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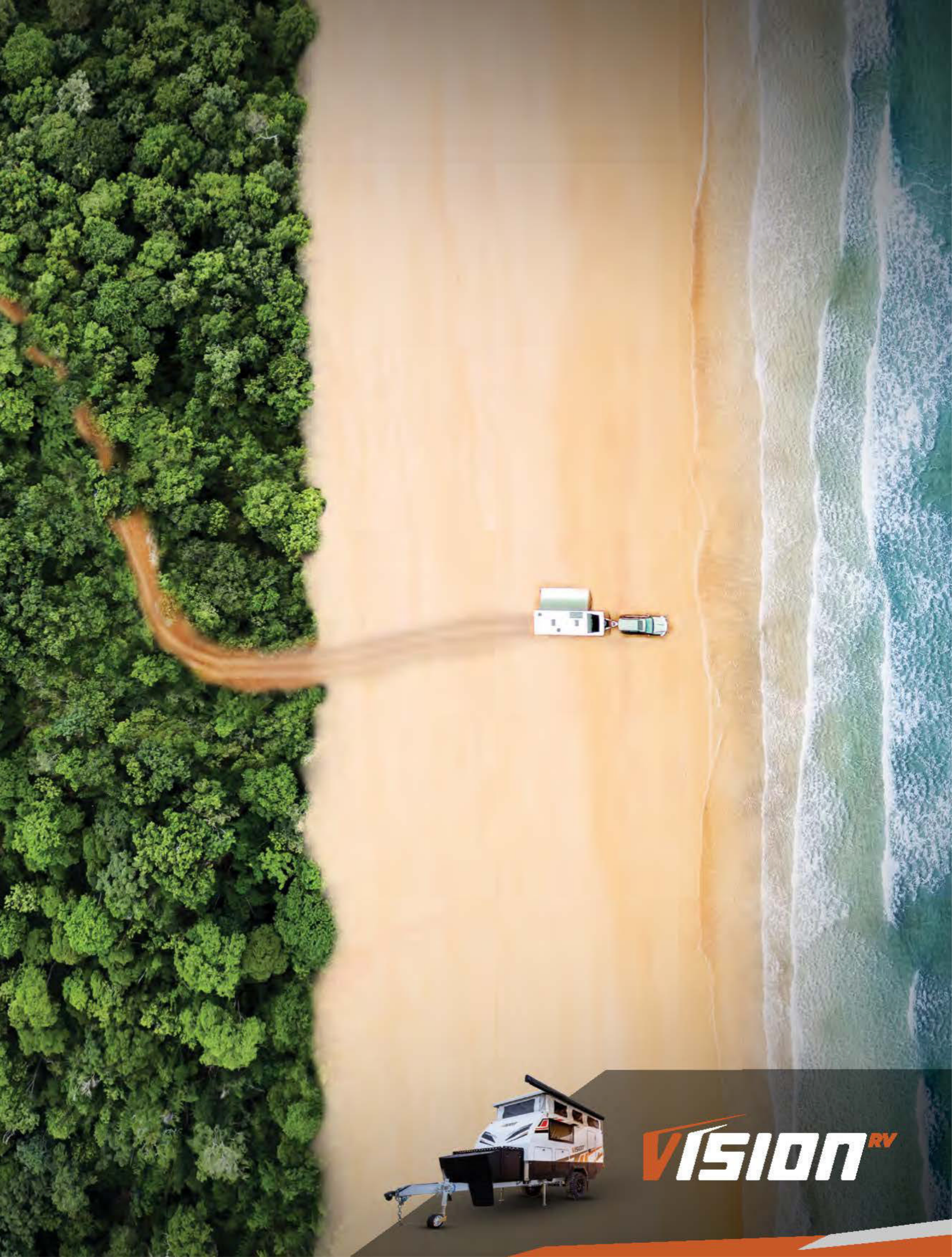
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FIRST WORDS JOHN FORD

Because around this time of year, many of us are looking forward to hitting the road, we have gathered features on getting things ready to roll. Malcolm takes you through what needs to be done with the van, Allison talks budgets, John Hughes checks over the tow vehicle and Amelia warns about everything quarantine.

We are planning a trip across the centre, starting in a bit over a month, and the list of things to check is slowly being ticked off. This time though, I have jumped into the deep end, selling my trusty 100 Series LandCruiser and starting all over with a very basic 200. We covered many miles in the older vehicle, but I have had to face the reality that with getting a bigger van, we need to upgrade.

And because we often stress the importance of safe weights and proper preparation, we are doing things properly with a GVM upgrade first on a list of necessary improvements. It's going to be fun, and we will bring you news on how the build goes and how the changes work out on our journey.

It will be an interesting year for travel in many places around the country because the road conditions and available tracks are changing daily. Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie brought monster floods to Western Australia and the main road north is closed at the Fitzroy Crossing. It's hoped a low level crossing will be working by May.

Some WA parks are closed for the season, including Danggu Geikie Gorge and Bandilngan (Windjana Gorge), but there's still plenty to explore at Purnululu, Dulundi (Silent Grove), Walarra Mindi (Mt Hart), Lennard Gorge and Dimalurru (Tunnel Creek). And in South Australia, the Cooper is set to flood over the next couple of months, so outback travel will be interesting out there.

It's not only the west that has copped a hiding. Reports are coming in that hundreds of miles of rural roads are in a bad way. Hundreds of millions of dollars are needed to fix the washaways and potholes on major and local roads because of this year's floods. So, plan for a slower trip at all the roadworks and take it easy out there.

Have fun
John

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Spinifex Nomadix Premier 25
***Photographed by** John Ford*

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Goldy 16ft Beach Cruiser

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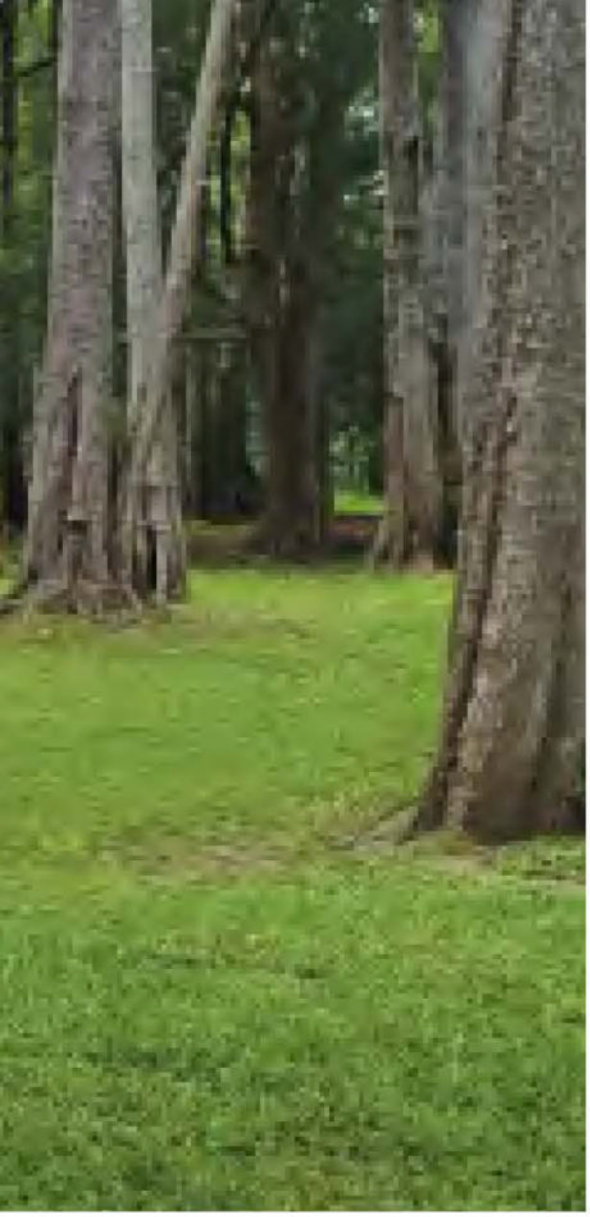

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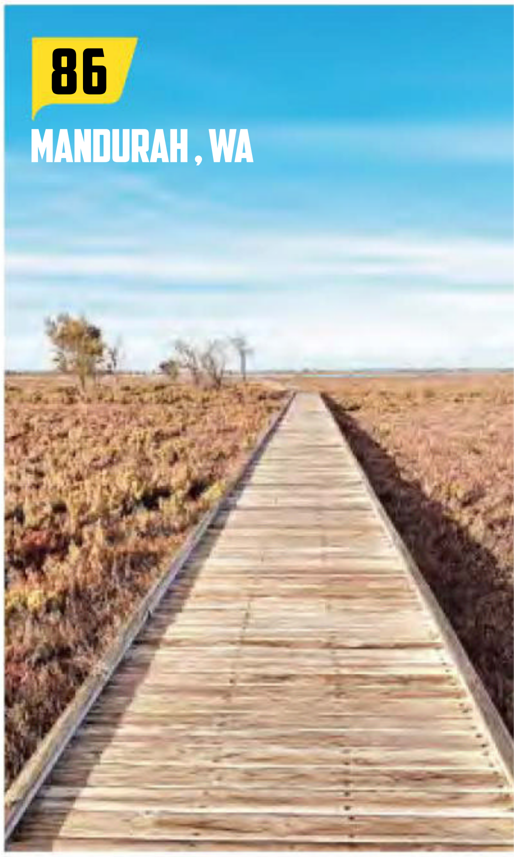

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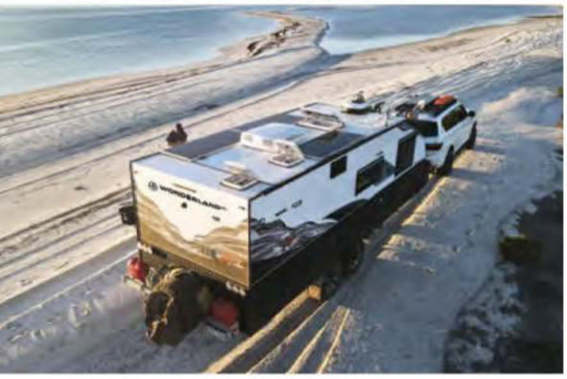

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VIC GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES NEW DRIVER DISTRACTION ROAD RULES

ABOVE Motorists caught driving distracted will receive penalties of four demerit points and a $555 fine

The Victorian Government has introduced new driver distraction road rules, which came into effect on 31 March 2023.

The new rules have extended existing mobile phone rules to cover modern technology including in-built vehicle systems, mounted devices, wearable and portable devices like smartwatches and tablets, and will bring Victoria in line with the Australian Road Rules.

Motorists caught driving distracted will receive penalties of four demerit points and a $555 fine. Community awareness campaigns will run over the coming months.

The Victorian Government is also investing $33.7 million as part of the Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 to introduce new mobile phone and seatbelt detection camera technology that will help catch people using their mobile phones and not wearing their seatbelts while driving.

Mobile phone and seatbelt detection technologies involve AI-enabled camera systems that can capture high-resolution images of passing vehicles in all conditions, including poor weather and low-light levels when distracted driving is even more dangerous.

The new camera technology will be operational on Victorian roads in coming months. A three-month warning period will apply from the technology's activation before drivers face infringement and demerit penalties.

"Too many drivers continue to put lives at risk using mobile phones behind the wheel. We're deterring this type of risky behaviour on our roads with these new road rules, as well as phone and seatbelt detection technology," said Minister for Police, Anthony Carbines.

"We need every motorist to make the right decisions when they're behind the wheel. When they don't, road safety cameras and Victoria Police are there to hold them accountable."

JAYCO REVEALS 2023 RANGE AND UPDATES

ABOVE Keep your eye out for Jayco's exciting new upgrades

Jayco has announced some exciting changes and innovations to its range of caravans and campers for 2023.

The range features enhanced off-grid capabilities, increased safety features, elevated interior and exterior designs, and the introduction of two new models to the Jayco range: the Wren Camper Trailer and Jpod-X, both of which are aimed at couples looking for an uncomplicated solution to the RV lifestyle.

The Jayco Silverline has received an all-new look, featuring updated front and rear moulding including automative style tail lights, new decals and a revised premium interior with one-piece composite PET floor. This evolution creates the most impressive and sleek Silverline yet.

Among the new features being added to the range is an anticipated upgrade to battery life with lithium battery upgrade options being introduced to the majority of the Jayco range.

Jayco's Off-Grid X upgrade has gotten bigger with an additional spec option featuring the powerful new Intelli-Jay High Power management system, 400Ah lithium battery, three 200W solar panels with 40Ah solar controller, 180A charging and a 3000W inverter – all of which combine to create an impressive power solution for travellers wanting to stay off grid longer.

The Off-Grid X upgrade is currently available on Jayco's All Terrain caravans, with plans to roll out the upgrade to other models later in the year.

Another enhancement is the new water-filled plumbing console, which has been adopted across the range.

The All Terrain caravan and Pop Top ranges have received an anti-lock braking system and larger shock absorbers.

For more information on Jayco's 2023 range, head over to www.jayco.com.au or visit your local dealership.

ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE AND ISUZU UTE TEAM UP TO SAVE LIVES

Royal Flying Doctor Service
ISUZU UTE
MAJOR NATIONAL PARTNER

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Isuzu D-MAX, Isuzu MU-X and RFDS Beechcraft King Air B360 aircraft; Isuzu D-MAX towing RFDS simulator; Isuzu UTE Australia Deputy Managing Director Mr Koichiro Yoshida with RFDS Federation Executive Director Mr Frank Quinlan

Isuzu UTE Australia (IUA) has announced a long-term national partnership with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). This major national partnership will assist with delivering better health outcomes to Australians living beyond the reach of mainstream medical services through financial support and the provision of a fleet of Isuzu D-MAX and MU-X vehicles.

"Isuzu UTE Australia understands the importance of having dependable transportation in isolated and challenging environments and as such, our D-MAX and MU-X vehicles are a perfect match for this sometimes remote work and the long-distance towing demands of the Royal Flying Doctor Service where reliability is crucial," said Isuzu UTE Australia's Deputy Managing Director, Mr Koichiro Yoshida.

"This new and exciting partnership with the Royal Flying Doctor Service now enables IUA to support many of our regional, rural and most remote communities by aiding the incredible work provided by the RFDS – and complements our ongoing support of Surf Life Saving Australia that assists and services coastal-based communities," Mr Yoshida said.

A valuable asset and support for the RFDS, the Isuzu D-MAX and MU-X vehicles will be enlisted to tow the Flying Doctor's state-of-the-art training simulators around the country for its schools Education Program and national events program.

"As a national health charity, the support from individuals, small businesses and corporations has underpinned critical delivery of primary health and emergency medical services for decades," said Frank Quinlan, Federation Executive Director of the RFDS.

Support via corporate partnerships such as this from Isuzu UTE Australia help the RFDS to purchase new aircraft, invest in critical infrastructure, upgrade life-saving medical equipment and deliver essential primary healthcare and mental health services.

Isuzu UTE Australia will be in partnership with the RFDS for at least the next three years and looks forward to making a meaningful impact in the lives of those in need of vital health services in rural and remote communities.

MDC ANNOUNCES RELEASE OF NEW XT RANGE FAMILY CARAVAN

BELOW MDC Camper Trailers and Offroad Caravans releases its newest model, the XT17HRT Family

MDC Camper Trailers and Offroad Caravans released its newest model, the XT17HRT Family, at the Let's Go Gold Coast Caravan and Outdoor Expo last month.

This innovative and dynamic new model of offroad caravan has been through extensive testing and development and features a comprehensive list of standard inclusions to enable owners to escape with confidence and for longer.

Boasting an impressive 875W of rooftop solar, 400Ah of lithium power, a 2000W Pure Sine Wave Auto Transfer Inverter and Full Battery Monitoring with a power management app, this model leads the way in off-grid capabilities at a market-leading price point.

Sleeping five people, the flexible internal living space design of the XT17HRT Family provides several living modes. There is a king bed upfront, bunk beds that convert to day seating and a spacious cafe dinette converting to an additional bed.

There is a full internal kitchen at the rear, as well as MDC's signature external slide-out kitchen, ensuring the family can enjoy meals no matter the weather.

In terms of safety inclusions, MDC has provided features such as electronic stability control and a wireless rear-view camera as standard on the XT17HRT Family.

Set to escape absolutely anywhere at any time, the XT17HRT Family also comes standard with features such as air-conditioning and diesel heating, television and TV antenna and a heavy-duty ARKXO750 jockey wheel, just to name a few.

MDC is family owned and run and has been operating for more than 15 years, during which time eight showrooms have been established across the country, making MDC one of Australia's largest distributors of campers and caravans with more than 30,000 units sold nationwide.

KIMBERLEY NATIONAL PARK CLOSURES IN 2023 DUE TO FLOOD DAMAGE

Two of northern Western Australia's most popular national parks will not reopen this year due to flooding, dealing another blow to tourism operators in the Kimberley.

Bandilngan Windjana Gorge National Park, 140km north-east of Derby, experienced extensive damage by a record-breaking flood of the Lennard River in January. The entry road, ranger infrastructure and ablutions were damaged in the impact. "We're still waiting for waters to recede, but parts of the walk trail into the gorge have washed away and there's been significant damage to the banks. There's been half a metre of water through the ranger quarters and mud through the buildings," said Craig Olejnik from the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).

ABOVE Danggu Gorge National Park lost 37 hectares of land and all its infrastructure during the Fitzroy floods (Image DBCA)

The gorge, which features striking limestone cliffs, is visited by up to 20,000 tourists a year.

The second popular national park to be struck was Danggu Gorge National Park, near Fitzroy Crossing. This park will also remain closed after the flooding Fitzroy River wreaked havoc through the area, including washing away 37 hectares of the Danggu park and all its visitor and ranger infrastructure, according to the DBCA.

Both gorges are popular day-trip destinations from Derby, Broome and Fitzroy Crossing, and Kimberley tourism operators had been preparing for a bumper season after three years of pandemic-related cancellations and border closures.

January's monsoonal low dealt the entire region a blow, more than 100 homes were extensively damaged, the Fitzroy River bridge was broken and dozens of people remain displaced three months after the event.

Other attractions like Dimalurru Tunnel Creek, Purnululu National Park, Bell Gorge and Mitchell Falls are expected to reopen when road conditions allow.

DBCA hopes repairs this year will allow Bandilngan Windjana Gorge to reopen as normal in 2024 while Danggu Gorge may open later in 2024.

MY23 CHEVROLET SILVERADO 1500 RANGE REVEALED

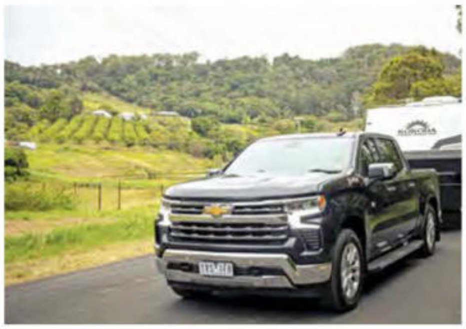
General Motors Specialty Vehicles has revealed the new MY23 Chevrolet Silverado 1500 range, with the new model offering significant enhancements inside the restyled cabin, advancements in exterior aesthetics and the introduction of the first-ever ZR2, which offers improved off-road capability while maintaining on-road refinement.

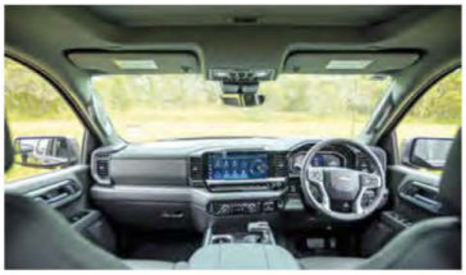
The Director of GMSV, Greg Rowe, said, "The new MY23 Chevrolet Silverado will cement itself as the benchmark for those who want to live big as they tour and tow across the country in comfort and style, as well as adventure offroad in the absolute best GMSV has to offer."

The LTZ Premium offers 4.5-tonne towing while the new offroad-focused ZR2 has 4.2 tonnes available.

The exterior of the new MY23 features a redesigned front fascia complete with new daytime running lights. But the biggest and most immediate change is an entirely new interior. "The inside of the Silverado has been fully redesigned and features a sweeping horizontal instrument panel that makes the cabin feel more spacious and gives it a premium feel," said Mr Rowe.

Both the LTZ Premium and ZR2 feature the 6.2L EcoTech3 V8 engine, delivering 313kW of power and 624Nm of torque. When towing, the 10-speed automatic transmission provides seamless and smooth transitions from gear to gear.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT MY23 Chevrolet Silverado ZR2; MY23 Chevrolet Silverado LTZ Premium; MY23 Chevrolet Silverado interior

The ZR2 offers a ZR2 Suspension Package with high-performance lifted suspension and Multimatic DSSV™ dampers, front and rear electronic locking differentials and two-speed transfer case with push-button controls. The drive modes include terrain mode, with 'one pedal driving' experience and a front grille-mounted camera for better obstacle visibility. The ZR2 features a unique black chrome grille with a Chevrolet 'flow-tie' emblem, exclusive 18in gloss black wheels and jet black/greystone leather-appointed interior with black trim.

Safety is at the forefront in the MY23 truck, with both models offering a comprehensive suite of active and passive advanced safety technology and driver assistance features, including Rear-Cross Traffic Alert, StabiliTrak® Electronic Stability Control System with traction control and forward collision alert with low-speed automatic emergency braking.

The Silverado 1500 LTZ Premium and ZR2 are available in nine different colours. The MY23 Silverado LTZ Premium is available in Australia for $128,000 and the Silverado ZR2 is available from $133,000. Keep your eyes out for an upcoming tow test by the *Caravan World* team.

GREAT AUSSIES GIVE BACK

Continuing a family legacy that started with the founding of first aid company SURVIVAL 35 years ago, Mike Tyrrell and his family embarked on their around-Australia odyssey, the Great Aussie Give Back, in January 2023. The family is now caravanning around the country to ensure all corners of Australia have access to life-saving first aid supplies. SURVIVAL is today a globally recognised brand intent on creating a safer world for us all.

Mike said the purpose of the Great Aussie Give Back is to continue the principles of giving on which the brand has been built and grown.

"Over the past three decades, SURVIVAL has given away more than 50,000 first aid kits and educated countless individuals from Mumbai to Mudgee in proper first aid practices," said Mike.

"We also make regular donations of pre-loved kits and first aid supplies to charity organisations and orphanages in Australia and overseas, as well as to first-on-ground emergency responders in all types of disaster situations."

"This trip is about taking my family on the road to help ensure even the remotest parts of our country have access to potentially life-saving first aid resources and education around what to do in an emergency situation, which in many cases could mean the difference between life and death."

Having pioneered several life-saving products, from the award-winning First Aid Emergency Handbook to the revolutionary SMART Bandage and Snake Bite Kit, SURVIVAL partners with prominent organisations and individuals including Guy Leech, Pat Callinan, Coyote Peterson and most recently Bondi Rescue's Anthony 'Harries' Carroll to help share its important safety messages.

For further information visit www.survivalfirstaidkits.net.au

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ABOVE SURVIVAL CEO Mike Tyrrell and family

PRESSURE MATTERS

With
MALCOLM
STREET

This month Malcolm talks about the importance of correct tyre pressure on your van or motorhome

It doesn't matter how sophisticated a caravan, tow vehicle or motorhome is, or even how the driven vehicles are powered, there always must be tyres between the vehicle and the roadway. Both a comfort and safety item, tyre technology has changed much over the years, but the basics remain the same. It's a fact that most tow vehicles, caravans and motorhomes all run on Light Truck tyres. The reason is that LT tyres have a firmer side wall, allowing them to carry more load. Tyre sizes should always match those on the vehicle compliance plate or the trailer nameplate.

Tyre pressures in caravans and motorhomes are a regular topic of social media posts. The most significant query is the correct tyre pressure for a particular caravan or motorhome. That's important because an underinflated tyre or an overinflated tyre can affect tyre performance and, long term, will be detrimental to tyre wear. Underinflated tyres will wear on the outside of the tyre tread and overinflated tyres will wear in the middle of the tread. The latter might reduce the tread in contact with the road and affect vehicle handling. Note that for some offroad conditions, such as sand or corrugated roads, tyre pressures can be lowered temporarily to give better traction.

Tow vehicle builders always specify correct tyre pressures, including in towing situations where the front and rear pressure can differ. Many caravan and motorhome builders do the same but if not, there are a couple of ways to work out the correct tyre pressure. One is a more theoretical calculation than the other. It looks like this:

$$\frac{\text{Maximum tyre pressure}}{\text{Maximum tyre load}} \text{ X } \frac{\text{Load on wheels}}{\text{Number of tyres}} = \text{tyre pressure}$$

On all tyres, apart from anything else, there should be (1) the maximum tyre pressure (PSI or KPA) and (2) the maximum tyre load (kg). Note that the maximum tyre pressure is the maximum it can be inflated to, not the required air pressure. Two other figures are needed; one is the loaded weight on the wheels – preferably determined by weighing – in the case of a caravan that does not include the towball mass. The other figure needed is the number of wheels. For a tandem axle caravan with a loaded weight of 2800kg, a maximum tyre pressure of 80psi and a maximum tyre load of 1250kg, the calculation looks like this:

$$\frac{\text{80psi}}{\text{1250kg}} \text{ X } \frac{\text{2800kg}}{\text{4 tyres}} = \text{45psi}$$

An alternative is the 4/6psi method, which requires a good quality tyre gauge and works this way. Inflate the vehicle tyres to either the recommended tyre pressure, if known, or by using the figure determined by the above. Drive for an hour, warming up the tyres. Measure the tyre pressures again. The ideal is a 4psi increase for car tyres and a 6psi increase for LT tyres. If it's below those figures, then the tyre is overinflated, and if it's over those figures, the tyre is underinflated. While the tyres are still warm, adjust the tyre pressure to be 4/6psi above the original cold pressure. This process will undoubtedly have to be repeated a couple of times but persistence should pay off with a fairly accurate tyre pressure. Just as a side note, it's interesting that although we live in a metric country, the caravan industry mostly still uses feet and inches for van measurements and most people still use psi rather than kpa for air pressure.

TOWING WEIGHTS

Along with the rest of the *Caravan World* team, I have just returned from *Caravan World's* Caravan Of The Year (COTY) event. Undoubtedly, the quality of the vans was very high, making the judging decision difficult, and I will certainly not reveal anything here. One noticeable item though was that, for the first time, a substantial number of US pickup trucks, either RAMs or Chevrolet Silverados were used as tow vehicles. As someone who thinks that the industry needs to focus on reducing caravan weights generally, this is not a good sign. I'm not convinced that the way to solve excessive caravan weights is by using larger tow vehicles.

Still on weights, it's all too easy to exceed a vehicle's GVM, GCM or a caravan's ATM. On one of our tow tests with all four judges on board and some gear in the back of the vehicle, someone did a quick load calculation and figured we were really close to the tow vehicle's GVM. It may be time for some of us to lose weight too!

ABOVE AND BELOW Big US trucks are increasingly being used as tow vehicles; Incorrect pressure can affect tyre wear and vehicle handling

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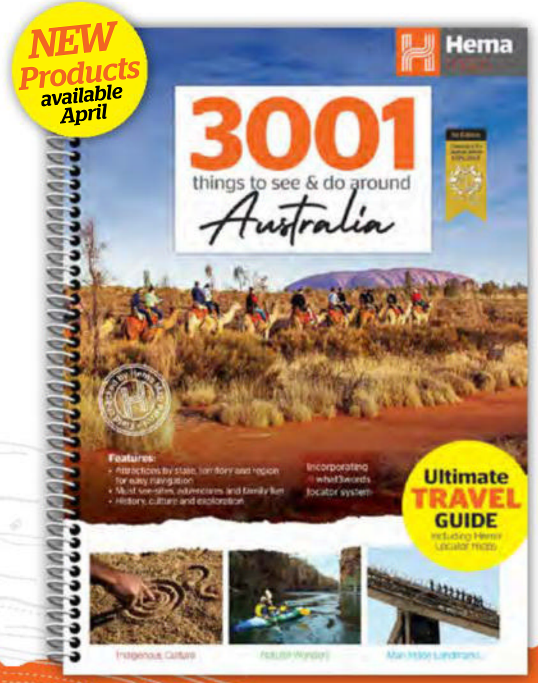
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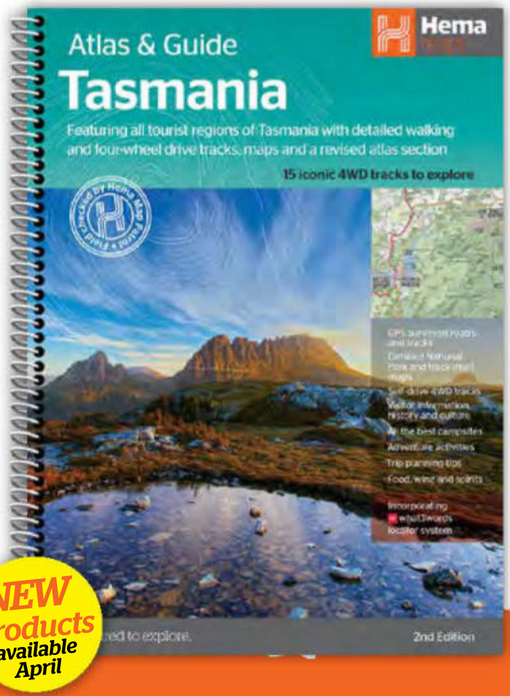
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With
ANITA AND MIKE PAVEY

PUPPY PROGRESS

Life with our furry friend

Back in *Caravan World* issue 629, we welcomed a new bundle of joy into our lives with the addition of Bindi, a black Cavoodle puppy with white goatee, filling dual roles as both pet and a wellbeing companion to help Anita manage her MS symptoms.

She entered our world having big paw prints to follow, living initially in the shadow of Mieka who passed away two years prior. If dogs could wear capes, Mieka was that dog; a loyal companion, super camping pooch and general lap warmer. She blessed us with 16 happy years.

Mieka loved the RV lifestyle. In her early days, she helped as a Camp Host, breaking down barriers between campers to help spread the word about sustainable camping. She loved the river, paddling around with and without her buoyancy vest or sunning herself on the deck of a houseboat.

Nine months on, Bindi has settled in well to daily life. Our day starts and ends with a cuddle on the bed, that soft Cavoodle fur adding to the experience.

All was well for a long time, settling down in her crate next to our bed each evening. It only took one sleepover at a friend's place (the dog, not us) and she came home a bed hog, allowed to sleep on our friend's bed with their dog.

Yet Bindi is very considerate, curling up into a ball to consume minimal space. She likes to tuck in behind your knees which we find very comforting.

Those early morning dog toilet trips are now long gone. Instead, each morning she does the commando, creeping up towards the pillows on her belly, in most cases at our chosen hour to communicate the time is right.

Car travel has been her Achilles heel, suffering car sickness on almost every journey, with or without food in her stomach. And no, it is not our driving style! As such, we have not been able to progress to a camping trip yet, which has been very disappointing for everyone.

Anita has also taken a few falls recently, her MS challenging her mobility. The last fall resulted in a broken ankle which kept her off her feet for the best part of eight weeks. So, it hasn't just been challenges with Bindi impacting our ability to travel.

We are very grateful for the Navigator Dog Buddy for road trips. Picture a big fabric bucket strapped between the front and second row seats. Made with a treated material, little accidents are easily mopped up. Zip up sides prevent an escapee whenever the doors are flung open and a mesh centre piece provides good vision forward.

We have experienced further success with a dog booster seat in the second row, which props her up higher, keeping her attuned to the outside world while keeping her delicate sense of equilibrium. We are also experimenting with a dog pheromone spray to help manage anxiety. The pheromone mimics the scent released by a mother dog to calm her puppies. So far, so good.

We are hopeful to escape for our first camping getaway together at one of our favourite stomping grounds, the Flinders Ranges, in a few weeks' time, staying at a Station Stay. The journey is a good half day drive, plus station tracks when we get there, so it will be a next level test for us all.

In the meantime, Bindi continues to come to work with us daily, to keep everyone on the top of their game. Dogs make a great workplace addition, particularly when they are cuddly. Despite our dream jobs helping customers find their ideal RV, there is a lot of work done in the background and Bindi seems to instil a sense of calm. Feeling stressed? Take the dog for a short walk or give her a cuddle. She talks to us in dog speak when she wants some attention too.

Dog-friendly customers are drawn to her as well. Whether she is behind her knee-high fence chewing a toy or on occasion, let loose and greeting them at the door, with one of our team in hot pursuit. She has well and truly cemented her position as a key member of our family and work team.

See you on the trails.

NAVIGATOR
NAVIGATOR

ABOVE AND RIGHT A dog booster seat helps puppies manage their delicate sense of equilibrium; Navigator Dog Buddy keeps Bindi contained as well as making clean-ups manageable

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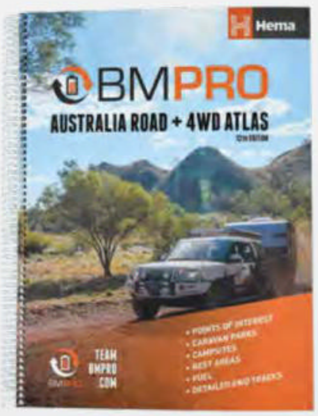

BMPRO

BATTERY STORAGE

NEW REQUIREMENTS – WHY?

This month David answers a question from a reader about new standards for storing batteries in caravans.

Q Dear David
I have just heard there are new standards around storing batteries in caravans – will this be retrospective and enforceable?

Pete Weatherley, St Albans, VIC

A Thanks for your question, Pete.

The storage of batteries within our caravans and campers has been a hot topic for many years, with various interpretations and opinions as to the best storage methods.

Now there is a new sheriff in town, in the form of Australian Standards AS/NZS3001.2:2022 – released in mid-November last year after much consultation with electrical experts and industry. The standards are embedded within Australian Design Rule ADR 42/05 (section 21.7) as the new AS 3001 standard.

Since it is now part of Australian Design Rules, all manufacturers and importers must comply. While any new standard or requirement creates an initial impost on a business in the way of time, cost and labour, it does create a platform whereby manufacturers, consumers and the industry as a whole can have confidence in more standardised products with new levels of safety and consistency.

The standards cover a wide range of topics, but one in particular that is a focus for us in the Battery Management System sector is the storage of batteries. Most caravans, motorhomes and campers that hit the road are installed with lead acid batteries and we have seen a few different storage systems over time. Unfortunately, some methods of storing the batteries are questionable. This month's article addresses Pete's question and covers why the standards are necessary.

While I am not a fan of over-regulation, I have been consistent in this column in explaining good practice in electrical systems, and sometimes a bit of regulation cleans up substandard systems, which tarnishes the majority of well-thought-through installations. It's nothing that caravan builders shouldn't already be doing.

The types of lead acid batteries generally used by manufacturers are SLA – meaning Sealed Lead Acid – also known as VRLA, Valve Regulated Lead Acid. Both have a one-way, high-pressure valve towards the top of the battery to release any excessive build-up of gases created internally during the charging process. However, these gases are usually absorbed back into the battery's internal chemistry. But, excessive overcharging caused by a faulty battery or charger produces more gas than can be reabsorbed and, therefore, to prevent a battery from expanding and opening (resulting in spillage of unsafe sulfuric acid), the one-way valve allows this release safely. This gas combines hydrogen, oxygen and sulphur – flammable and toxic in the right combination and concentration.

While it would take particular circumstances to create a flammable or explosive situation with the release of hydrogen and oxygen, it is, however, more likely to experience the 'rotten egg' smell from emitting gases such as hydrogen sulphide, which after more prolonged exposure or concentration cannot be picked up by the human nose and can cause severe sickness such as apnoea, coma, convulsions, dizziness, headache, weakness, irritability, insomnia and stomach upset.

For these two primary reasons, the new standards call out specific measures to mitigate the build-up of gases from excessive gas release from these batteries.

With recent figures from the Caravan Industry Association of Australia (CIAA) showing that the number of imported RVs is increasing, it is essential that the standard is consistently applied to all. The new standard has become effective now, but it will only become enforceable on new RVs from mid-November 2024. So, there will be no 12V police walking caravan parks to ensure compliance. However, there is an expectation for Australian manufacturers and importers to comply with the new Australian Standards, and we anticipate the industry to call out non-compliance. Next month we will expand on how the new rules will apply in practical terms.

Safe travels,
12V Guru

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With
STUART LAMONT

SOVEREIGN CAPABILITY

The past few years have seen Australians fall in love with the open road again. After being locked up through COVID-19, we have spread our wings and headed to our regional and rural areas for holidays in strong numbers. This too has seen growth in our own industry, with boosted demand for local and domestically manufactured product. In fact, the height of current manufacturing figures has not been seen since Cyclone Tracey in 1978.

Over the course of 2022, the largest number of new recreational vehicle registrations ever was welcomed into the Australian market, with nearly 50,000 new registrations hitting the road. Recreational vehicle manufacturing is, without a doubt, one of Australia's largest remaining bastions of sovereign automotive manufacturing, with local manufacturers pushing more than 28,000 units out their doors last year – up 17.1 per cent from the previous year.

The pandemic highlighted a number of points for the industry. It demonstrated, as it has done many times before, its resilience and ability to pivot, adapt and move forward through challenging circumstances. Yet, one of the strongest points to come through was what the industry means to Australia. It resides as a continuous thread in our collective fabric.

However, one of the challenges presented to the industry, like many others, was the fragility of international supply chains and Australia's dependence on them (largely China). Even though the majority of RVs are produced in Australia, they are constructed from both domestic and imported components. Supply chain disruptions (not exclusively caused by the pandemic and some ongoing) coupled with labour shortages and lockdowns, resulted in wait times for new caravans during the pandemic being pushed out to frustratingly far delivery dates.

The cost of importing goods has risen and we expect will continue to rise, with our key markets continuing to focus internally and battling skills shortages and contracting productivity levels. All elements that contribute to making imports far less financially attractive.

Combine this with the shaky foundation of international supply chains that are subject to many vulnerabilities outside the control of any one government, and it is a strong argument for Australia to focus on the restoration of domestic manufacturing capabilities. In fact, it was for similar reasons that automotive manufacturing first started to develop within Australia in the early 1900s, mostly for the logistic isolation of our island continent. However, as of 2015-16, the sector has all but shut up shop; designing cars locally, only to be produced offshore and shipped back.

Though it is unlikely that recreational vehicles will follow suit entirely, there needs to be strategic realignment to fortify and sustainably grow the sector. Headwinds and complications continue to emerge that will play a role in shaping what the future of the sector looks like.

These can be as far flung as drought conditions in Europe draining the rivers and canals used in shipping lines, or issues much closer to home, such as the fact that China is ever increasingly focusing on its own domestic production while decreasing its exports combined with the rising cost of transporting those exports. You can even add to the pot of factors outside logistics, such as the commercial race to develop economically viable alternative fuels and vehicles, driven by government and consumer expectations, with the need to be able to adapt manufacturing designs and capabilities rapidly to stay competitive and concurrent.

The shifting sands of global markets are unpredictable by nature and Australian businesses have increasingly less control over the procurement and availability of materials and goods, in turn causing stalls in output. This issue is economy-wide and has affected even essential services such as healthcare in the supply of medical equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Australia currently ranks lowest among developed countries in manufacturing self-sufficiency, producing only around two-thirds of what it consumes. The wide gaps in our manufacturing capabilities have been identified by the Federal Government as a broad-reaching issue and it has made it a key focus area of the National Reconstruction Fund. The Fund is a $15 billion initiative to be injected into critical infrastructure projects across the country, with the aim of creating jobs, boosting economic growth and improving the nation's overall resilience.

If we choose to look away from a potential horizon, the industry could face real risks of being left behind in the race to net zero, the ever-increasing costs of imported components, losing the ability to price competitively, and potentially losing the ability to remain profitable.

The good news is recreational vehicle manufacturing in Australia is already ahead of the pack. The industry has the advantage of strong tradition, know-how and existing infrastructure; there's no need to build from the ground up. However, what does need to happen is diversification, innovation and further development of our manufacturing capabilities to break the shackles of dependency on international supply chains and secure our place as an innovation leader into the future.

Stuart Lamont
Chief Executive Officer

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ABOVE Ford Ranger Sport V6 (Image Cam Inniss Photography)

LETTER OF THE MONTH

FORD RANGER OVERHEATING

✉ Hi John,

In a previous issue, one of the reviewers towed a van with a new Ford Ranger. They stated they had transmission overheating issues. This scared the daylights out of us, as we had just taken delivery of the same vehicle and about to start a trip around Australia.

Since then, we have towed up and over the Great Alpine Road in Victoria with no transmission issues.

PS: we're not employed by Ford but thankful that we had no issues.

Regards
Leanne and Neville Binns

A *Hi Leanne and Neville,*

Thanks for your letter and I appreciate your concern. We needed to make the potential problem with overheating clear in our review.

We have approached Ford about the issue, and the company advises that its engineering team took the vehicle that we reviewed to its proving ground in Victoria and ran it through a variety of tests in hot conditions and varying loads to understand what had occurred.

Ford advised that this testing highlighted that the digital cluster temperature gauge had been incorrectly programmed, with the gauge effectively 'over-displaying' the actual temperature. This means that it will hit the bottom of the orange at a 'normal' temperature.

Ford confirmed it has issued an update to its team in the plant and will also make the update available to vehicles already on the road at a dealer service. Ford added that the temperature problem wasn't something it had seen until the experience towing the Cub.

We plan to have another tow test to see if the programming changes have made a difference. I also plan to retest the Ranger using a scan gauge to check the transmission fluid temperature when under load.

Tim van Duyl

TOWING WEIGHT RATIO

✉ Hi John,

What ever happened to the vehicle caravan towing weight ratio? Can anyone tell me how a vehicle towing rate capacity is worked out. I recently had a Toyota Kluger towing a 2T pop-top caravan, which is the maximum towing capacity for a Kluger. It was a good heavy vehicle and towed my van beautifully and was solid on the road. I then traded the pop-top up to a full-size van weighing in at 2800kg and had to also upgrade my vehicle. So, I bought a new SUV that had a towing capacity of 3.1T which suited my new 2020 van. This new SUV had a bigger towing capacity than the Kluger but was narrower and lighter with a smaller motor. It towed the bigger van easily, but in my opinion was dangerous when towing. Any cross wind or a truck passing, and you were battling to hold it on the road especially if caught unaware. Eight months later I couldn't stand it any longer as it really felt unsafe, so sold it at quite a big loss and bought a Jeep Grand Cherokee. I am now a happy camper again as the Jeep sits solid on the road under all conditions, tows my van beautifully and surprisingly, even though it is a heavier vehicle, gives me a much better fuel consumption. Even in a strong crosswind the van and car keep a good straight line on the road. I am really pleased with my rig setup now. Just sometimes I'm amazed at what is towing bigger vans and surprisingly legal as well.

I have subscribed to *Caravan World* for many years now, a great travel magazine with interesting and informative topics.

Regards,
John and Cath Burges

A *Hi John and Cath. It's a good question and the answer seems to be the same as it has always been. Most experienced* *caravanners will tell you the tow vehicle needs to be heavier than the van. Other things come into play, like the capacity of the vehicle's rear suspension. The Jeep seems like a popular choice and I hope it brings you years of service.*

Cheers,
John

ELECTRIC CARAVAN MOVER QUERY

Hi John,

Do you have any information for people wishing to purchase an electric caravan mover? Have you possibly done a review of some over the past 12 months?

My van is an Evernew single axle pop-top, unladen weight is approximately 1300kg.

I have been using a mechanical MULE rachet to position the van in my garage, however an electronic control would make it much easier. Looking forward to your advice.

Thanks,
Henk Hulsman

A *Hi Henk. Yes, we reviewed an Optitec remote control caravan mover a few months ago. We moved a van similar in size to yours with ease and the mover seems robust and reliable. The mover takes its power from the caravan battery. They have been a longtime supporter of* Caravan World *and we often get good reports from owners.*

All the best,
John

VAN WASHING MACHINE TROUBLESHOOT

Hi John,

Every time we use our washing machine in our van it shakes the van really badly when it's going through different cycles. We have tried to even out our clothes when using the machine but it still happens and now we are worried its causing damage to the machine.

Regards,
Wayne

A *Hi Wayne. Most washers vibrate when they are on the spin cycle but it's not great when the vans a' rockin' because of the washer. Even domestic machines go out of balance, I suspect for the sake of the van and the machine it would be best to have a repair agent investigate.*

Regards,
John

THE PRICE OF CARAVANS

Hi John,

I have recently started reading *Caravan World* again after a couple of years, reading the four issues from December 2022. What surprised me is the $12.50 cost of the magazine.

Then, the price of caravans these days! Most north of $100k.

But reading the article on the Bruder XP-8 – the price – I nearly choked on my coffee!

If I was buying a caravan today at those prices, I would be buying a motorhome.

My Coromal Appeal 554S in 2016 was $50k tow away.

Prices are getting out of reach as are tow vehicles, for the average person.

Safe travelling,
Chris Sinclair

A *Hi Chris. Perhaps the Bruder story should have come with a warning but I'm not sure we can be hit up for the dry-cleaning bill. Sorry about the price rise of the magazine, but given the escalating cost of everything, it was inevitable. Maybe watch out for some exceptional deals when you subscribe. Don't be too sure a motorhome is the answer. I have seen a few with $1m price tags, and that's not including the under floor Ferrari. Don't forget you could buy a family house in 2016 for around $400,000. These days that wouldn't get you an outhouse in any of our big cities.*

Have fun,
John

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How to win

If you're stumped by a technical or towing problem, send your question to **submissions@emprisegroup.com.au** with 'Tech Talk' in the subject line or send a letter to *Caravan World* Tech Talk, 3 Wyman Place, Braeside, Vic 3195. All entries must include your full address (not for publication).

TRAVEL HAPPY

We shine the spotlight on caravanners, their rigs and their travel tales

SEND PICS TO WIN

Susan Cooper sent in this picture taken from the verandah of her brother's home on the Hastings River just out of Port Macquarie, NSW.

"This photo makes our 23ft van Safari Delta look small, as does our Ram 1500 which was the best weight ratio to tow this big van. It is a perfect spot, we stayed for three nights but could have stayed for weeks especially when it was free."

Noelene and Brenton Scholz had a wonderful trip through lower Qld/NSW in their 2009 Prado and 2011 Crusader Pop Top.

"Our favourite place was the beautiful Carnarvon Gorge and the many wonderful waterfalls we ventured to in many different areas. This photo is our camp at Lake Keepit in NSW."

Col and Leanne Rosa stopped in at the Nullarbor Roadhouse on their recent half lap.

"This sign says it all. We love travelling in our 2014 Ford Ranger and 2012 Jayco Starcraft."

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After being diagnosed and treated for high-risk prostate cancer, Ferg le Juge de Segrais joined PCFA (Prostate Cancer Foundation Australia) to help raise awareness and funds for research.

"My wife Chris, 14-year-old blue heeler Dusty and I are driving from Guilderton, WA, to Mataranka, NT, where I will train on my bike to do the Gibb River Ride, hopefully in May. Our plan is to visit camping grounds along the way and speak with travellers about prostate cancer – hopefully we'll raise some funds for research, but the main focus is reaching out to as many men about being responsible for their own health and getting blood tests done for PSA every year once they reach 50 years of age. https://fundraise.pcfa.org.au/s/1209/1259."

WIN!

This month's winner will receive a Purple Line Saracen Ultra Hitch Lock valued at $189. Saracen Ultra is a highly visible, compact, high security lock which works both hitched and unhitched to keep would-be caravan thieves at bay. It fits to most standard 50mm ball hitches on caravans, camper trailers, boat and car trailers and even work trailers. **For more information about this and a host of other vanning accessories, visit purpleline.com.au**

SARACEN ULTRA

Scott Papeneux sent in this pic of his wife Gabriele enjoying the sunset while they were overnighting in their Windsor Rapid and 2020 Pajero, north of Coober Pedy off the Stuart Highway, en route to the Northern Territory in 2022.

WINNER
WINNER!
WINNER

HOW TO WIN

Just email your most travel-inspiring picture (2-3Mb) of yourself, family, or friends with your rig along with a brief description to submissions@emprisegroup.com.au with 'Readers' Rigs' in the subject line, or send a print to Caravan World Readers' Rigs, 3 Wyman Place, Braeside VIC 3195. All entries must include your full postal address (not for publication). Photo submissions may also appear on caravan.hemax.com

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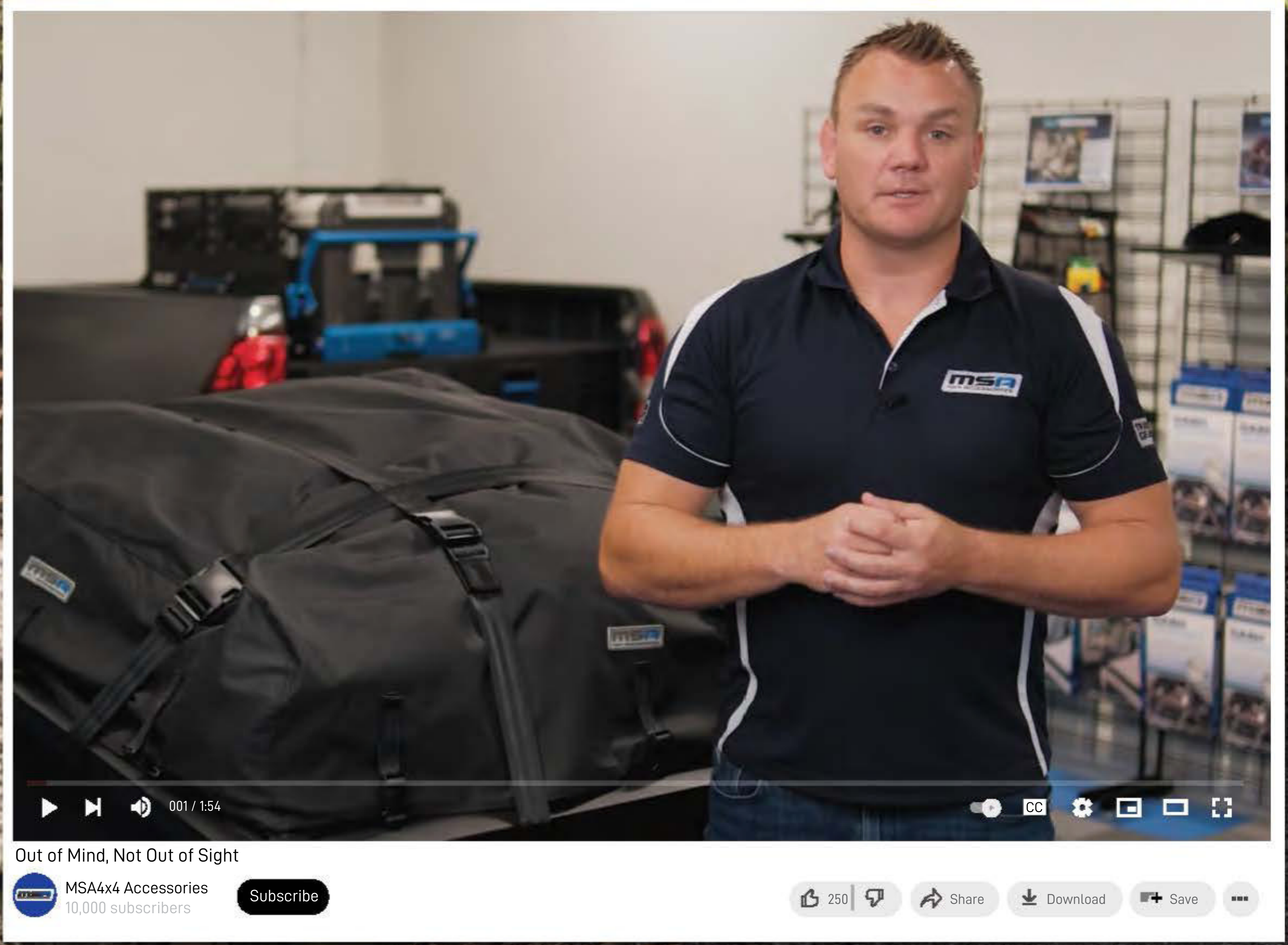

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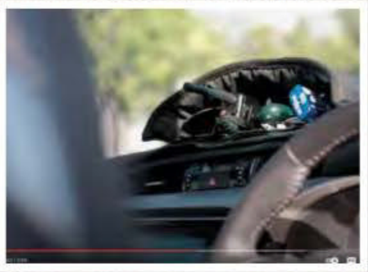
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IN BRIEF

- Big van for experienced travellers
- Needs a heavy-duty tow vehicle
- Set up with high-quality battery power for off-grid living

This 25ft Spinifex makes a considerable statement strapped to the back of a 3500 GMC.

GOING FOR A SPIN

Words and Pics
JOHN FORD

We run dozens of caravan reviews every year here in *Caravan World*, and on most occasions, the vans are stock models from the dealer yard or straight off the production line. So, it's rare that we meet the buyers for an idea of why they chose a particular van. But with this impressive big Spinifex, we spent a day with the owners in southern Queensland to discover what led them to Spinifex and their travel plans.

Spinifex is a dedicated custom offroad builder based in Deception Bay, north of Brisbane. It has manufactured vans since 2007, and the one on review is number 468, so it has a vast knowledge of what works in rough conditions. This low-volume builder takes pride in getting things right so that warranty issues are minimised. Instead, Spinifex will do it once and do it right, and the number of repeat customers trading up to a new van is a testament to the quality ethos. Its vans are built on heavy-duty chassis with a robust frame in the best tradition of Queensland offroaders.

The owners of our review van, Carol and Tom, are on their fifth van and their third Spinifex. Their loyalty to the brand started in 2011 with Spinifex build number 32, when they found Spinifex could make it to their preferred layout when other brands wanted to stick to a set design. They stepped up to build number 222 in 2018, and in the four years with that van, they covered over 100,000km across the country, including two trips to their favourite haunts in Tasmania. A desire for more modern electronics and reliable battery power prompted the change to the latest model, and they were delighted at the resale value of the previous model.

The van is a Nomadix 25, making it one of the longest vans we have reviewed for some time. Matched to the couple's GMC 350, the combination is an impressive sight, and the big 6.6L turbo diesel V8 is a good match for the van's 3360kg tare and 4500kg ATM. The GMC is kitted with a large alloy tray canopy and boat rack for a 3.8m tinny, which goes on most adventures.

ABOVE AND RIGHT The Spinifex Nomadix Premier 25 is built for outback travel; Owners Tom and Carol enjoying their custom van

THE BUILD

A big offroad van needs a robust foundation and the twin 75mm x 50mm x 3mm BlueScope steel chassis is built to take on the challenging outback tracks without giving up. Spinifex has a fabrication shop where it makes the chassis before it is shipped to be galvanised by hot dip. The shop also produces all the custom toolboxes and brackets.

The interlocking aluminium wall and roof sections are riveted together and bolted to the chassis to form a robust monocoque construction. Next, 30mm polyboard insulation is cut to size to fill the voids in the frame, and the exterior is then clad in 4mm composite fibreglass panels. Finally, the roof section runs in one piece from the front chassis to the window at the rear for an efficient waterproof finish.

A team of four full-time cabinet makers and an upholsterer hand-build the interior furniture. It's an old-school method of interlocking timber which Spinifex insists is the best method for a van subject to the vibration and movement of offroad travel. Handcrafting also allows complete customisation of the cabinetry layout and design.

The suspension is Cruisemaster's tandem 4.5T airbag system with trailing arms and twin shock absorbers at each wheel. The brakes are DeeMaxx electric over hydraulic 12in discs.

MEASURING UP

PROS

- High-quality fit-out and engineering
- Ample off-grid power
- Room to move

CONS

- Needs an upgraded tow vehicle

"The owners of our review van, Carol and Tom, *are on their fifth van and their third Spinifex*"

"A 3500 GMC is hard to miss, but with an overall length of 10.3m, *the big Spinifex dominates the scene*"

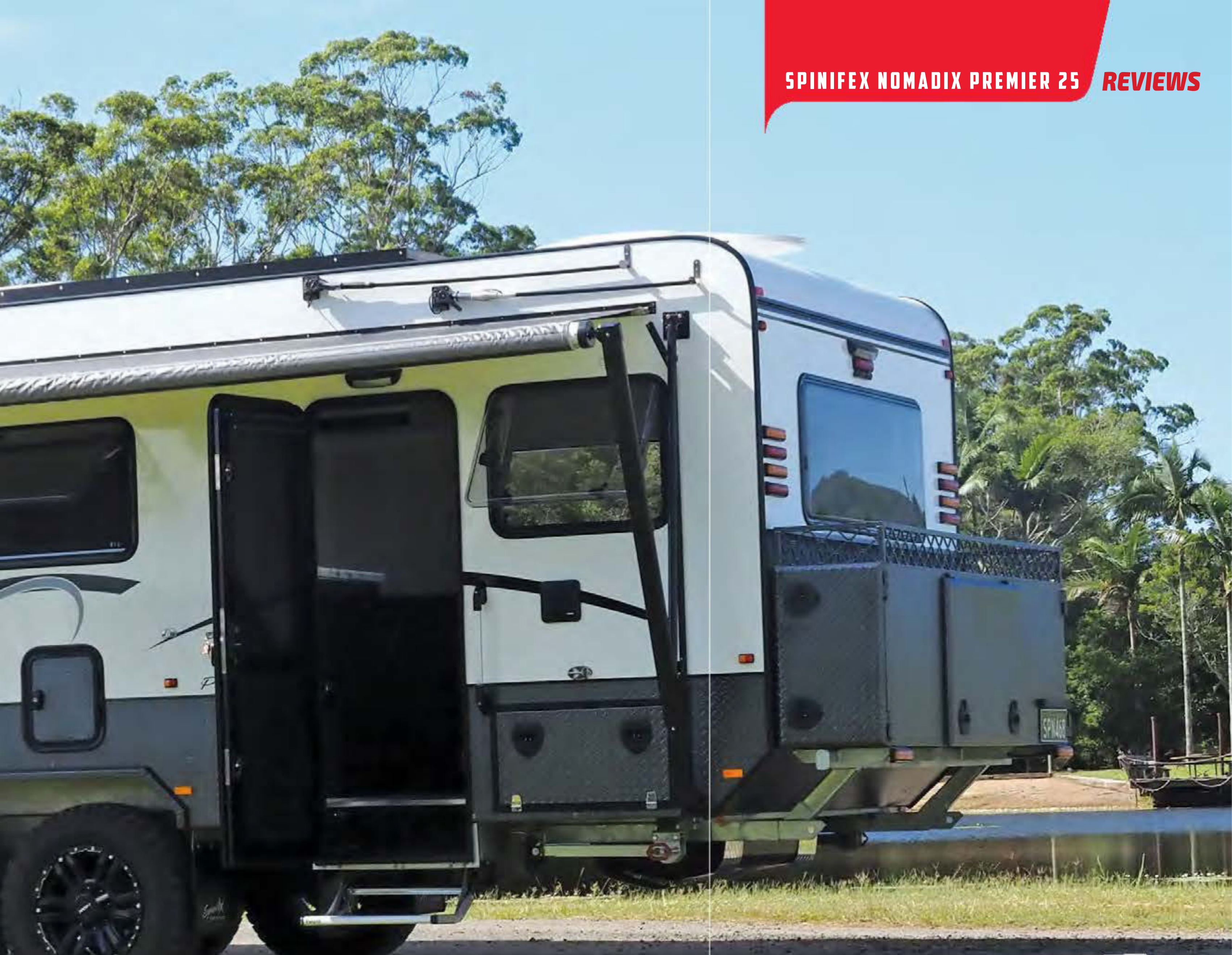
THE EXTERIOR

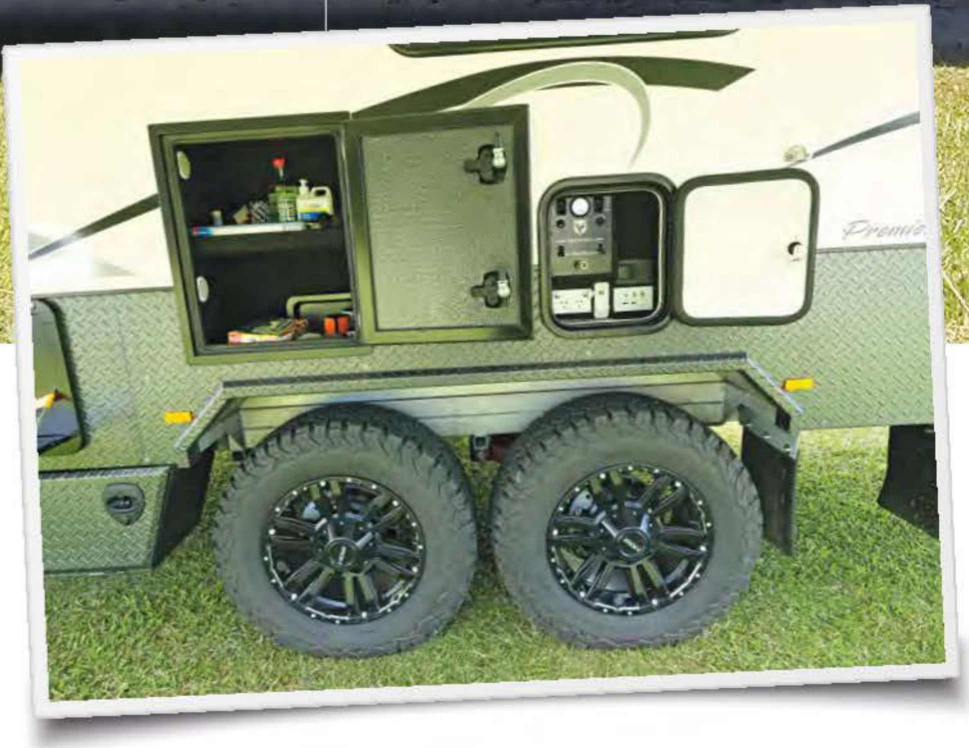
A 3500 GMC is hard to miss, but with an overall length of 10.3m (34ft), the big Spinifex dominates the scene. The review van was finished in white, a sensible colour for the tropics, and it gave the van a clean and fresh image. The sides and rear get the ubiquitous Propeller plate treatment that designates an offroader, but in a less obtrusive Aztec silver. At the back, things look neat with custom boxes instead of spare wheels. The single spare is hidden underneath.

At the drawbar, the Air Safe receiver is rated at 600kg ball weight and matched to a Cruisemaster DO45 pin connector. That extra capacity for ball mass might come in handy because plenty of storage at the front will add to front-end weight. A Black Jack electric jockey wheel is permanently mounted forward of the sturdy stone guard, and a reservoir for the hydraulic disc brake fluid is well protected lower down.

A 15L diesel tank sits inside the stone guard, and twin jerry cans ride aside a pair of 4kg gas bottles for the barbecue. Also, up front, a full-width custom toolbox with side and top compartments holds a mix of mats, tools and cooking equipment.

Moving back along the passenger side, we find a slide-out kitchen with bench space and a storage bin for condiments and staples. Two picnic tables will be handy for preparing meals, and over the wheel arch is a second pantry, so there's loads of space for outside dining. Next is a hatch for 12V and 240V power and the controls for setting the air suspension when parked. You can drop the van's height for easy entry or level it on uneven ground. Another storage hatch is aft of the door, with access to the inverter and electronics and a small amount of storage. Finally, a 23ft Aussie Traveller Sunbuster



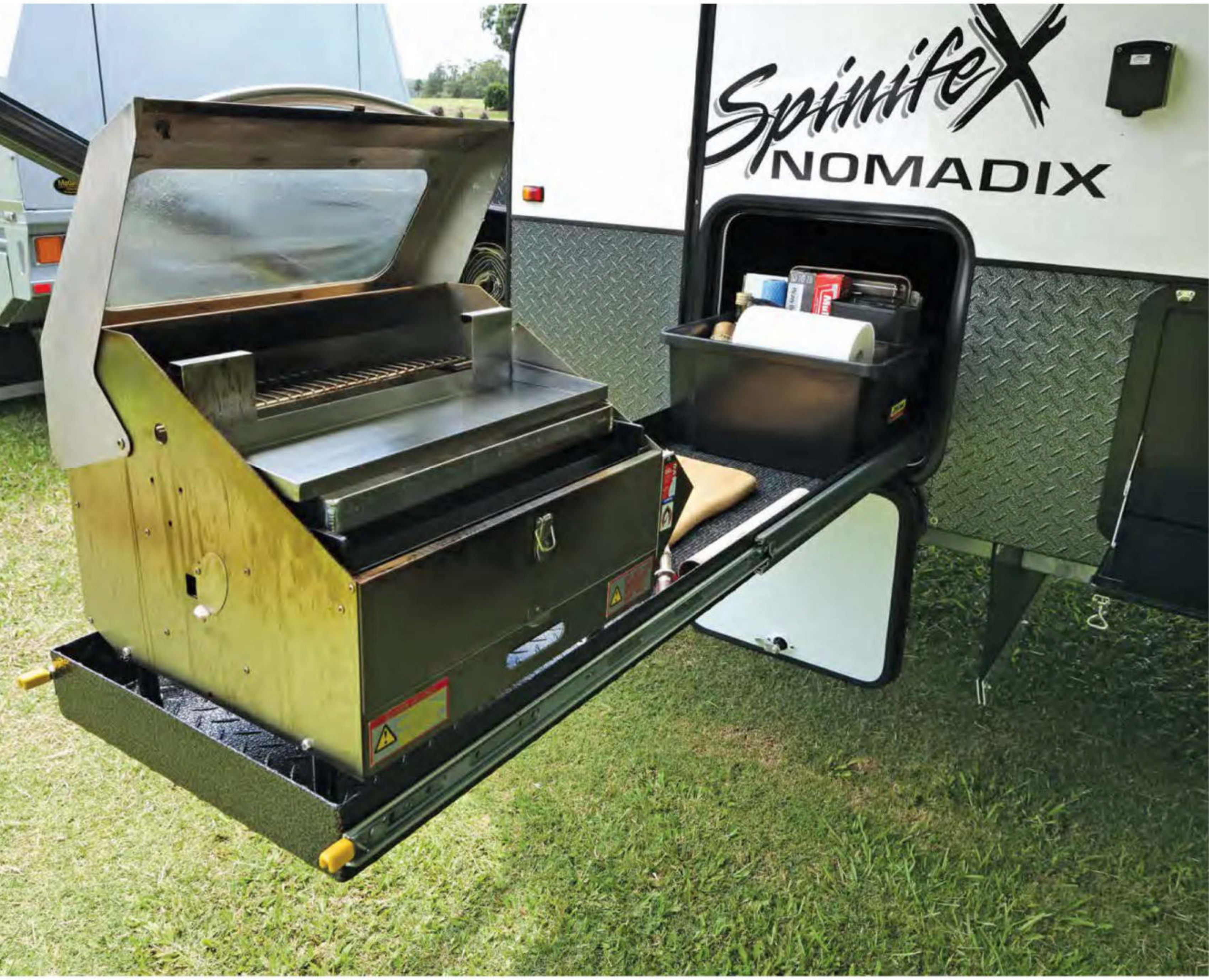


awning is as big as you will find, giving ample weather protection to the outside area.

Across the back is another custom storage box with three compartments, including a sealed section for a generator and a sturdy wood tray on top. You might notice the rear lights are mounted above the toolbox on the body, and while it might look like they are too high to be legal, there's a smaller repeater set on the bumper bar that keeps the specs correct. More toolboxes mount to the chassis ahead of the wheels, and a hatch on the driver side gives access to even more external storage.

ABOVE AND BELOW The 23ft Aussie Traveller Sunbuster awning gives plenty of weather protection outside; Exterior storage hatch with access to the inverter and electronics

BELOW There's plenty of exterior storage for all the necessities



OFF-GRID LIVING

Before we head inside the van, it's worth considering the electronics package, as this is why the couple upgraded to the Nomadix Premier. On top of that, the healthy power supply ties in with some of the design features on board. Spinifex switched to the OzXcorp power supply about a year ago, and many customers, like Carol and Tom, are finding the amount of self-sufficiency is a game changer. The system integrates 1320W of solar (four 430W panels) with a 14kW lithium battery through OzXcorp regulators and a 5000W inverter to allow the use of domestic appliances in a gas-free environment. In addition, Truma Combi D6 Diesel systems take care of room and water heating, so there's no need for gas vents in the cabin.

Combined with two 200L freshwater tanks and 80L of drinking water, the couple can stay in the bush for extended periods. And that's how they like it. Tom explained that they enjoy the caravanning lifestyle because "we can stop where we like for as long as we like." It is all about being able to free camp and fend for themselves.

THE INTERIOR

When presented with such a big van, expectations are high that the interior will be spacious and comfortably liveable. This is especially true when the layout was chosen by a couple with more experience living in a van than most of us. Carol and Tom's choice is a similar layout to their previous van, and it seems like a perfect compromise for a couple planning long adventures on board.

A single electric step makes entry a breeze, especially when the airbag suspension is at its lowest level. The layout is a central split bathroom with a rear entrance and rear

LEFT Plenty of storage in the ensuite

SPINIFEX NOMADIX *PREMIER 25*

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Overall length 10.3m (34ft)
External body length 7.69m (25ft 3in)
External body width 2.45m (8ft)
Travel height 3.1m (10ft 2in)
Internal height 1.98m (6ft 5in)
Tare 3360kg
ATM 4500kg
Payload 1140kg
Ball weight 400kg
Ratio ball/tare 11.9%

EXTERNAL

Cladding 4mm fibreglass
Chassis Twin 75mm x 50mm
Suspension 4.5 Cruisemaster XT air
Coupling Cruisemaster DO45
Wheels ROH Vapour 18x9 Tyres BFG KO2 285/65 R18
Water 2 x 200L freshwater, 80L drinking water
Battery 14kW
Solar 4 x 430W
Air-conditioner Webasto
Gas 2 x 4kg
Sway control None

INTERNAL

Cooking Dual hob induction cooktop
Fridge 285L
Microwave Convection microwave
Bathroom Yes
Washing machine Yes
Hot water Truma Combi D6

PRICE FROM $212,000

OPTIONS FITTED

- Upgrade to 14.3kW battery
- Rear box
- Side boxes
- External kitchen
- 285L fridge

PRICE AS SHOWN $230,000

MORE INFORMATION

To enquire about this caravan:
Spinifex Caravans
21 Imboon Street
Deception Bay Qld 4508
P: (07) 3888 2221
W: spinifexcaravans.com.au

living space and a bedroom up front. The van impresses with a high level of finish and a pleasing conservative choice of colours.

At the rear of the van, there's a set of face-to-face benches upholstered in dark grey New Zealand leather. It creates a beautiful feeling of space and means that two can spread out comfortably, while generous size windows wrap around on three sides to take in the view. The Nuova Mapa table is fully adjustable and moves out of the way for easy access or lots of legroom. With a big TV and satellite dish, Tom can spend his Saturdays watching the footy or keeping an eye on the horses from anywhere in the country.

Kitchen benches run either side of a wide walkway back to the ensuite, and there's plenty of room for dinner preparation. In addition, a 285L fridge offers weeks of cold storage. You may notice there's no traditional oven, so all cooking is done in a convection microwave or on a two-burner induction cooktop that hides away when not in use. As well as designing a kitchen that worked for her, Carol also insisted on a washing machine being built into the benches right at the doorway to give easy access to their portable clothesline.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
A big van with every extra, so you should expect a high price tag

TOWABILITY
Needs a heavy-duty tow vehicle but it tows smoothly and with reasonable economy

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
Well set up for a couple to tour for extended times and live in comfort

BUILD QUALITY
Craftsmanship is on show throughout the van, fine finish inside and out

LIVEABILITY
Ample room to spread out, good options for cooking and loads of cold storage

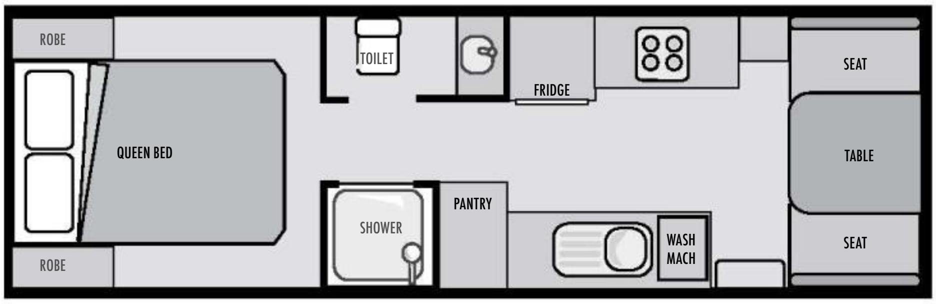
SELF-SUFFICIENCY
This is the current off-grid standard for power, plenty of water as well

CUSTOMER CARE
Spinifex prides itself on doing things right but has great backup if there's a problem

INNOVATION
The company is happy to offer customers custom touches

X-FACTOR
The van has monster wow factor especially hooked up to the big GMC

> "Kitchen benches run either side of a wide walkway back to the ensuite, *and there's plenty of room for dinner preparation*"



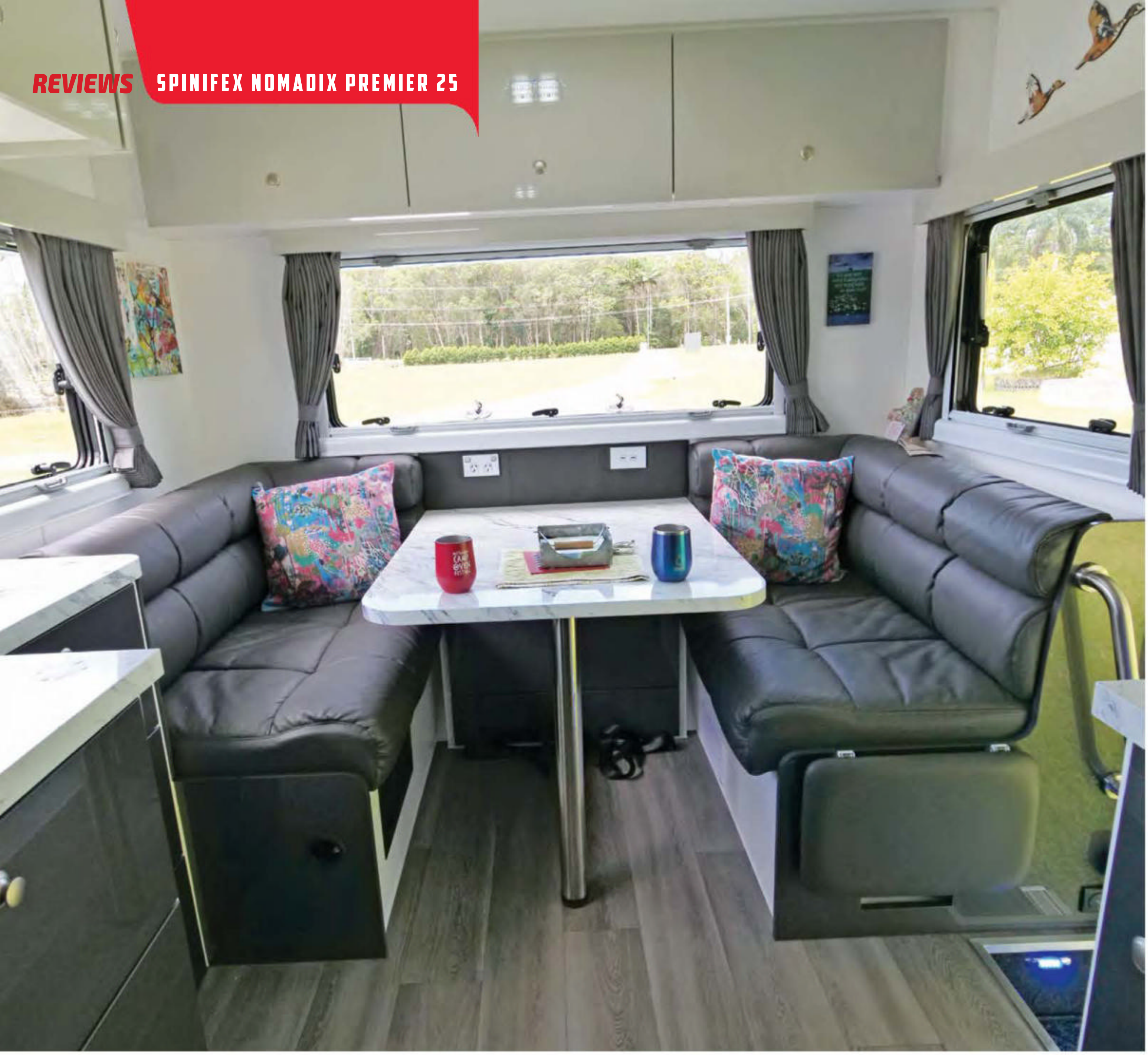
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Plenty of cold storage in the 285L fridge; A good size bedroom to the rear of the van; Plenty of room for dinner prep with benches running on both sides of the van

The central section of the van has an ample wardrobe and the shower on the passenger side, and the toilet and vanity opposite. Further back is a good size bedroom with a Webasto roof-mounted air conditioner, oversized windows and a raised bed with lots of space for extra clothes or bedding.

THE DRIVE

With a holiday load and tanks filled with water, the van's weight heads over the four-tonne mark, so the latest GMC is a good match with 329Nm and 1250Nm matched to a six-speed Allison gearbox. The tow connection needs to be very robust, and Spinifex recommends a Class 7 Air Safe hitch, which handles the load and minimises any rebound from the van on bumpy roads. We headed into the hills of the Sunshine Coast Hinterland and the ride was soft and effortless, even up steeper hills. The big discs on the Cruisemaster suspension pulled us up swiftly and smoothly. Tom reported that fuel consumption when cruising at 100km/h was around 23L/100km, which is good considering the size of the rig.

The van's 4500kg ATM leaves a very usable payload of 1140kg, so there's the capacity for ample supplies when free camping.



ABOVE AND BELOW A comfortable dining setup with plenty of natural light; The owners are happy behind the wheel of the GMC with over four tonnes of Spinifex in tow

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Spinifex is a big rig in anybody's language. The owners, Carol and Tom, have arrived at their optimum van after years of experience on the road. With a career of trucking miles behind him, Tom is happy behind the wheel of the GMC with over four tonnes of Spinifex in tow. The Nomadix gives the couple the freedom to land anywhere they want, and they look forward to years of travel in style.

It seems that the couple aren't the only ones who like the idea of big vans and big tow rigs. The proliferation of American trucks continues at a pace even against a background of electric vehicles gaining in popularity. The Spinifex costs in the order of $230,000 as tested and a tow vehicle will be similar by the time you deck it out. However, those able to stump up the cash will have something special – a place of extra comfort and self-sufficiency to get away in style.

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OPPOSITE Free camping can mean dramatic savings when you're travelling on a budget

CANNY CARAVANNING

__Word__ Allison Watt
__Pics__ Supplied

So, you've made the decision to do the Big Lap or to head off exploring indefinitely. You've done all the planning, but the big question is 'how much money will we need?'

Travelling budgets vary greatly. Some couples who live frugally and sensibly can live on $500 a week, whereas a big, hungry family who likes to take part in lots of organised adventures might spend $1500 or more a week.

Budgets are a very individual thing and will depend on your individual circumstances and income.

Part of the appeal of caravanning is the freedom of the open road, but we have to snap back to reality when we realise that there are plenty of ongoing expenses. Whether you're looking to stretch your savings as far as possible or you'd just like to set out on more weekends, it can pay to be thrifty.

SET A BUDGET

Set a weekly budget and have a contingency in place for unexpected emergencies and things that pop up along the way. A budget should include the costs you will incur while travelling, such as fuel, food, accommodation, entertainment and activities. Some people also include the 'hidden' costs such as insurance, phone and other telecommunications in their budget planning.

Your budget will depend on your personal circumstances and your income, how far you intend to travel and over what time period, where you intend to stay, whether you intend to eat out a bit or always cook for yourself and whether you intend to take part in tours and other organised activities at the places you visit.

Set your budget and have around 20 per cent in reserve, on top of your forecasted day-to-day expenses. It's easy to anticipate things like site costs and petrol but it's the unforeseeable one-off costs such as ferry crossings or entry fees to national parks that can bite if you're not prepared for them.

If money is no object, go for it. If you are a canny caravanner, remember that 'penny pinching' and being totally focused on expenses will, no doubt, detract from the overall travelling experience. Before you travel to any destination, do the research on the 'must do/see' things and budget for them accordingly.

Just remember to keep it balanced. Don't plan to get by on the skin of your teeth the whole time or you won't think about anything else. Travelling on too strict a budget will restrict the things you can do and see, and you may end up missing all the good stuff. Everyone needs to spoil themselves occasionally.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Country showgrounds are often terrific and afforable places to camp; Save money by catching your own dinner; Farmers' markets are great places to stock up on fresh produce

WHERE TO CAMP

You might not want to stay out at a remote bush camp every night, but you also won't want to pay big holiday park prices every night either. Splitting your overnight stays in half between paid sites and free sites can add up to a dramatic saving. And while not every free site will be the picturesque bush camp of your dreams, the gems that you do discover will offer up a range of seclusion, scenery and unexpected delights that may well become the highlight of your trip. Caravan parks do have all the amenities, but they may all start to look the same after a while.

Hands down, one of the best ways to slash the cost of camping is to be totally self-sufficient. Having the ability to bush camp means you can avoid the more expensive campsites and save a few bucks on fuel by having more campsite options closer to where you need to be. Let's face it, the cost of a solar system and a camp shower will pay itself back in no time at all and totally revolutionise the way you camp in the process.

While you have free camping at one end of the spectrum and caravan parks with all the bells and whistles at the other end – there are lots of options in between.

In *Caravan World* Issue 632 we ran a feature on Country Pub Camping (www.countrypubcamping.com). About 1200 pubs across Australia take part and offer overnight parking spaces for self-contained campers behind, next to or across the road from their premises in exchange for patronage at the pub – a meal and a few drinks. Some will offer the use of toilets and/or showers for a small fee. This is not free camping. You are expected to patronise the pub. Pull up a chair at the bar, have a chat to the locals, learn a bit about the local community and support a local watering hole – that's half the fun. Pulling up for a night behind a pub and then sitting in your van with your two-minute

noodles is very poor form, so don't do it.

Showgrounds (https://sgcamp.simdif.com/) are also terrific places to camp and you'll find them in country towns all over Australia.

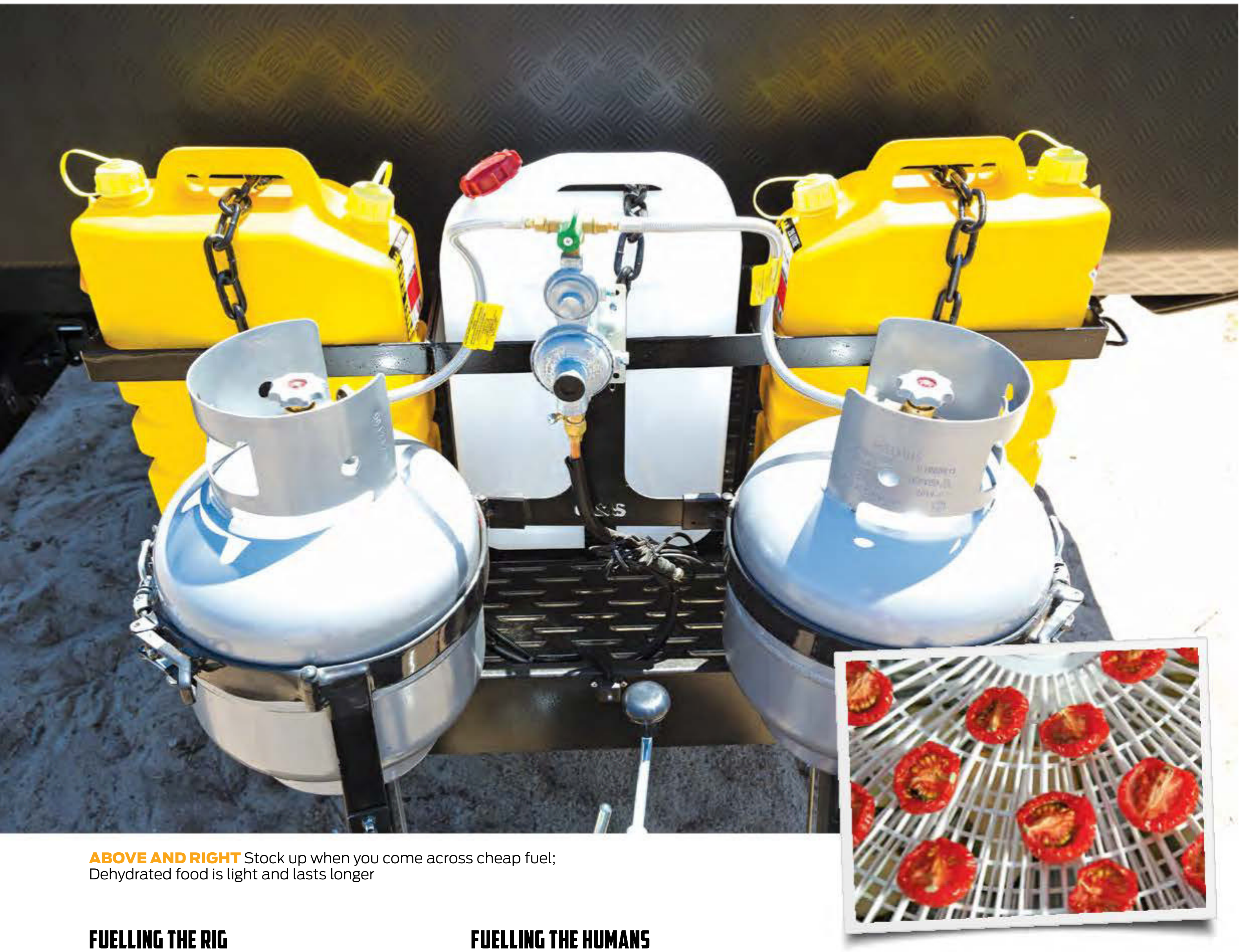
There are many Facebook groups devoted to showgrounds camping, so join a few to get the lowdown. A site can be as little as $10 per night and as much as $30 per night. Most will offer basic facilities – toilets at the very least – whereas others offer power, water and very modern, clean amenities with live-in caretakers keeping an eye on the place.

If you're after a taste of country living, then farm stays are the way to go. Not only will you discover unique settings at budget rates, you'll also be helping farmers and local industry. With farm stays becoming increasingly common, many now offer on-site activities such as horse riding and cattle mustering, as well as fresh produce straight from the source.

House/farm sitting is another great accommodation alternative. Websites such as Grey Nomad Caretakers (www.facebook.com/groups/2885907018158133 or www.thegreynomads.com.au/classifieds/help-wanted) will often have folks asking for travellers to come and sit their house or property for a few weeks, tend to the garden and feed some animals in exchange for a place to camp, sometimes with use of a bathroom thrown in. This is a great way to see some far-flung corners of the country.

> "While you have free camping at one end of the spectrum and caravan parks with all the bells and whistles at the other end — *there are lots of options in between*"

Celery
Parsley $2-



ABOVE AND RIGHT Stock up when you come across cheap fuel; Dehydrated food is light and lasts longer

FUELLING THE RIG

There's no getting around this. Fuel is expensive and if you are travelling, you need it.

Running out of fuel in the middle of nowhere is one of the most embarrassing situations a traveller can experience. Why? Because it's so easy to avoid. Find out how far you can travel on a tank with a full load and look for large gaps between service stations along your route. Apps such as FuelMapAustralia make this task easy. If it looks as though you won't make it, load up a couple of jerry cans.

In fact, jerry cans will come in handy when you come across cheap (cheaper) fuel. It doesn't hurt to carry a bit extra around.

Of course, how you drive can have a big impact on how much fuel you use. This might mean slowing down a bit or covering less distance each day, lightening your load and reducing the wind resistance of bulky items that you might have attached to your van or tow vehicle. And keep your receipts after a supermarket shop, a 4 cents per litre saving adds up when you're filling a big tank.

FUELLING THE HUMANS

Staying well fed can be one of the costliest parts of your trip, but only if you let it. With a little bit of creativity, you can cut your food costs way down without having to sacrifice the things you love.

One great way is to get a dehydrator and stock up on bulk dry food before you go. With the water all sucked out, it won't add anywhere near as much weight as frozen food, plus it doesn't need to be stored in the freezer.

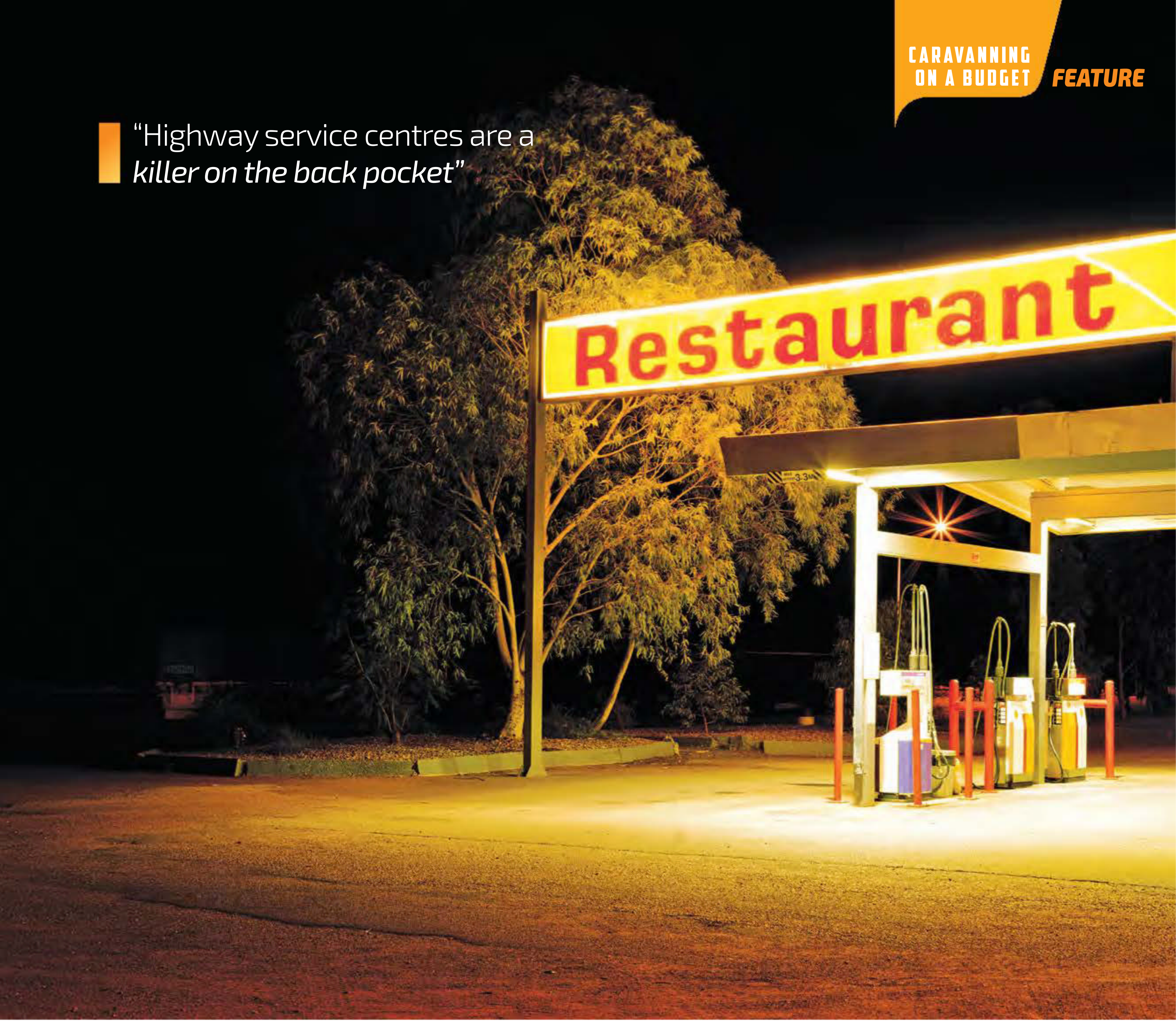
A vacuum sealing machine is also a great investment. Vacuum sealed food – especially meat – lasts longer in the fridge, so you'll be throwing out and wasting less.

Many travellers these days have a thermal cooker on board. Akin to a slow cooker but without the need for power, these oversized Thermoses allow you to prepare dinner in the morning – soup, casseroles, curries, pot roasts etc – seal it up in the thermal cooker and let it cook away in its own heat while you're travelling to your next destination. By the time you arrive and set up camp, dinner will be ready and still piping hot.

Cook your first few nights' meals before you leave home or cook double if you're on the road long term. Then freeze the appropriate number of portions and pop them in the caravan fridge the day of departure. They'll stay mostly frozen in there and you can grab them out an hour or two before dinner time to defrost properly. Stews, casseroles, satays and stir-fries work well, as these can be reheated in one pot. This allows you to use the contents of your home pantry which saves you buying basics such as herbs, spices, flour and rice on the road, and reduces food wastage as it's portion controlled. It'll also save you time, water and stress.

Highway service centres are a killer on the back pocket. While they may be convenient, truck stops are designed to keep you spending. The short walk from the bowser to the counter can be costly, so strap on your blinkers and don't get side-tracked by racks of hats and two-for-one chocolate bars.

Pack your own lunch and snacks for the car – a reusable water bottle, a Thermos of coffee and some handy snacks. A container



> "Highway service centres are a *killer on the back pocket*"

ABOVE While they may be convenient, truck stops are designed to keep you spending

of trail mix will keep the hunger at bay between meals – an assortment of nuts and dried fruits and, if you have kids, throw in some chocolate bullets or similar to keep it interesting.

While you're travelling, keep an eye out for farmers' markets and farm gates and any ways you can stock up on the cheap. Catching your own fish and, if you're prepared to learn the ins and outs of local tucker, the odd spot of foraging is not only cost-effective but a rewarding way to explore your surrounds.

When you're in larger towns, buy groceries – including water and alcohol – in bulk to keep you going for a few weeks.

Many travellers will not leave home without their coffee machine or preferred device so they can enjoy a good brew on the road. Let's face it, highway-side bakeries aren't exactly known for locally roasted single origin beans and world-class baristas. Unless you're happy spending $4.50 on scalding hot coffee-flavoured milk, then you'd be wise to have a good system in your van. Some go so far as to install espresso machines, but most will have their particular stovetop or hand-press of choice. Each morning, fill up a Thermos and you're set.

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

It's also good to consider what types of tours and activities you'll want to do when you're on the road.

Yes, a helicopter flight over Uluru is a once in a lifetime, bucket list experience that you may never do again, but it will come at a cost. Less expensive will be hiring a segway to circumnavigate the base of the rock, or if you're prepared for 10km of hoofing it, the walk is free and absolutely awe-inspiring.

There are plenty of free activities such as guided walks in national parks, as well as discounted days or seasons, so plan ahead and do the research before you leave home.

Volunteering is a great way to get free or discounted tickets to events, such as the Big Red Bash and Mundi Mundi Bash music concerts. Volunteers get a free ticket to these three-day desert extravaganzas in exchange for a few hours of 'work' each day that could including marshalling, cleaning toilets or selling merchandise. Volunteers are the lifeblood of these events and spots go quickly. This is just one example but there will be hundreds of others of similar opportunities around the country.

TRAVEL LIGHT

Consider what you're taking and don't take more than you'll need. If there's no need to take eight teacups, take four. If you're going to the Top End, you won't need layers of heavy bedding, puffer jackets or merino layers. While it's nice to be prepared for any eventuality, it's also important to remain practical because every extra bit of weight you're hauling will cost you in the long run.

Days and weeks on the road can take their toll in unexpected ways. While your van and vehicle might be up to the task, your wine glasses may not survive all those balmy evenings under the awning. If you find yourself needing to replace odds and ends, or you forgot to pack a crucial piece that'll make or break your favourite meal, head to the nearest op-shop. You can get a kitchen's worth of decent pots and pans with spare change at most regional thrift stores, and chances are you'll get by just fine without the latest and greatest NASA-grade non-stick technology.

ABOVE AND BELOW Take your preferred coffee making device so you can enjoy a good brew on the road; Cook double the required quanity of dinners and then freeze some for another day

> "There are plenty of opportunities to work while you are travelling to *earn a few extra pennies and keep the coffers topped up*"

TOPPING UP THE COFFERS

There are plenty of opportunities to work while you are travelling to earn a few extra pennies and keep the coffers topped up.

Many travellers will take on short-term or seasonal work at one location before moving on to the next. The harvest trail – fruit and vegetable picking – is popular among travellers and the shortage of workers became dire during and after the COVID-19 pandemic because overseas workers were not allowed into Australia.

Grey Nomads Jobs (www.greynomadsjobs.com) is a terrific conduit between employers and travellers. Register on this website and you'll find employment, jobs, house sitting and community opportunities with thousands of 'nomad-friendly' employers all over Australia.

For employers, it taps into the huge mobile workforce that is travelling right now and looking for opportunities – a highly skilled and experienced workforce. People who not only want to work but also want to stop and stay a little longer.

If you have some skills, you may be able to use them in other ways. Offer haircuts at your camp, sell the craft items that you make on the road or offer to do some odd jobs at the caravan park.

ABOVE AND BELOW Thermal cookers will cook dinner while you are on the road; Fruit picking is one of the many ways to earn some pennies while travelling

EYRE TIME

BELOW Kimba's Halfway Across Australia sign

Kimba
HALFWAY
A HISTORY OF KIMBA
RAINFALL 340MM
PERFORMAN
WA
KIMBA
SAVE WEDGE!

The beaches and towns found along South Australia's Eyre Peninsula coastline are worth travelling halfway across the country.

Words and Pics **MARK DAFFEY**

LIONS INTERNATIONAL
ACROSS Australia
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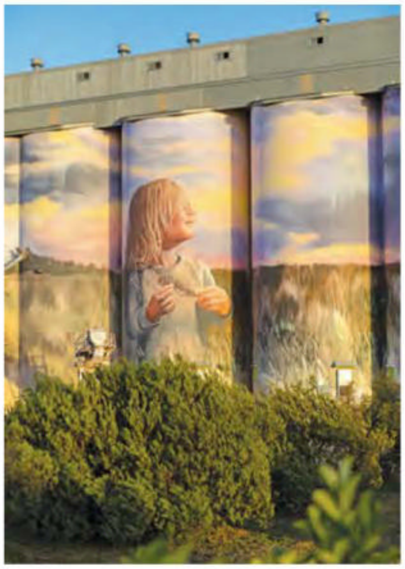
QLD
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
KIMBA
PORT LINCOLN
VIC
CEDUNA
GAWLER RANGES NATIONAL PARK
EYRE PENINSULA
PORT AUGUSTA
WHYALLA
COFFIN BAY
Sculptures at Whites Knob

There's a sign in a car park beside the Eyre Highway in Kimba reading: 'Halfway Across Australia'. It's supposed to indicate the halfway point between Sydney and Perth – a claim that's arguable, particularly if you happen to live somewhere further west along the highway such as Ceduna. But regardless of its accuracy, for us, Kimba marked the starting point of a road trip following the shoreline of the Eyre Peninsula.

I'd driven across from Melbourne with my wife and teenage son, a journey that took us three days in our motorhome. We could have done it in two, but we were in no rush, having allocated up to three weeks to complete the trip.

In Kimba, we'd found a campsite shaded by eucalypts at the recreation reserve – surely, one of the best free camping facilities in the country – then hopped on our bikes to ride down to the silo art and photograph the Big Galah. A quick stop at Whites Knob Lookout the following morning revealed acres and acres of grainfields all ripe for harvest, ahead of continuing our journey west towards Streaky Bay, the beginning of our coastal odyssey.

Being summer, we planned to focus our efforts on maritime pleasures such as swimming, snorkelling and surfing, rather than spending much time exploring the hinterland farming towns. South Australian summers can be notoriously hot, and we had concerns about suffering through sweltering days and balmy nights prior to leaving home. We needn't have worried, though. In fact, for a summer beach holiday we ended up experiencing surprisingly few true beach days thanks to persistent southerlies plaguing us throughout our trip.



ABOVE Kimba silo art, completed by Cam Scales in September 2017

KIMBA AH&F SOCIETY

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Big Galah outside Kimba's Halfway Across Australia gem shop; Leo Cummings Monument Lookout near Elliston; 'Sharing our history' mural on the Kimba Recreation Reserve Show Pavilion; Metal sculpture of European explorer, Edward John Eyre, with an Aboriginal guide at Kimba's Whites Knob Lookout

SEALY SEASON

"Is there a time of year here when the winds settle down?" I ask a waitress more than a week later at Port Lincoln's Marina Hotel.

"Not really," she replied. "It's like this most of the time."

We'd just stepped off a Calypso Star Charters boat, following an afternoon spent swimming with sea lions. It had been the highlight of our trip and, at a cost of $220 each, easily the most expensive. But how can you put a price on experiences that leave such lasting memories? By the day's end, the pain of forking out that much money, followed by a bountiful seafood dinner at the hotel, was well and truly forgotten.

For an hour, we had played in the water with adult and juvenile members from a 20-strong colony off Blyth Island, due east of Louth Bay. The stubby ears of some of the more curious sea lions pricked upon hearing our tender rumble towards them, and they poked their heads out of the water resembling aquatic meerkats.

At first, just two ventured close to us – a mother and her pup. Then others waded into the water from their beach lairs. At one point I counted 10 sea lions interacting with us. But the best was saved for last when an energetic pup and I circled each other non-stop for 10 minutes. I was exhausted when we were called back to our boat, but still buzzing about my dance partner hours later.

Funnily enough, it hadn't been our first encounter with sea lions during our trip. Five days earlier, two had appeared in the water not far from us as we swam off a beach at Walkers Rock, where we'd camped over two nights from New Year's Eve. I quickly grabbed my dive mask then waded back in. But, while still curious, this pair didn't linger for long.

Wildlife sightings weren't restricted to sea lions either. Dolphins had swum beneath us as we strolled along the Coffin Bay Jetty. Emus sauntered through the native scrublands bordering Yangie Campground inside Coffin Bay National Park. And pelicans were frequent companions, often loitering for fish offcuts in places like Farm Beach or Venus Bay.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Brennan's Wharf, Port Lincoln; Emu with chicks, Yangie Bay, Coffin Bay National Park; Templetonia Lookout view over Yangie Bay in Coffin Bay National Park; Pelicans awaiting fish scraps by the Venus Bay Jetty

WATER WORLD

Without a doubt, though, it's the beaches that are the star attractions of any tour through the Eyre Peninsula. Along the untamed west coast, from Streaky Bay down to Coffin Bay, massive waves batter the shoreline, carving out gaping caves and hollowing out swimming holes big enough to wallow in when the tides recede. Savage indents are left behind as the relentless winds and surf howl and surge northwards from the depths of the polar regions.

In between these splintered headlands are sandy morsels of sun-soaked paradise. From Streaky Bay, a fishing and farming town with a distinctive bohemian undercurrent, we savoured the emptiness of Hally's Beach, near Cape Bauer. As we drove along the Westall Way Loop to the town's south-west,

> ***"Without a doubt, though, it's the beaches that are the star attractions of any tour through the Eyre Peninsula"***

ABOVE AND BELOW Funk'd Cafe, Streaky Bay; Clifftop camping at Sheringa Beach

I salivated over the oceanic swells that brushed up against the lichen-covered boulders at The Granites, and we agreed that the dazzlingly white, powdery sand on Surfers Beach mirrored that ordinarily found along Tasmania's Bay of Fires or at Waterloo Bay on Wilson's Promontory.

After a rare night away from the coast, camping beside 100,000-year-old inselbergs named Murphy's Haystacks, our walk along the sand at Locks Well, following a thigh-burning 283-step descent, bore more than a passing resemblance to the beach at the foot of the Gibson Steps on Victoria's Great Ocean Road; all that was missing was the giant sea stacks that help make up the Twelve Apostles. And at Coles Point, my son and I whooped and hollered on our boogie boards as waves wrapped around the headlands and peeled away in glassy perfection.

With a 4WD and an offroad caravan or camper trailer, for instance, we'd have been better equipped to explore the further reaches of the Coffin Bay and Lincoln National Parks. Instead, we were confined to sealed roads or unsealed roads that were recently graded but which still managed to rattle and shake a few screws loose in the back.

On our first night in Port Lincoln we'd booked a powered site at the excellent Port Lincoln Tourist Park then unloaded our bikes so we could ride into town, past the port and its towering grain silos. For the next two, we saved our pennies by bunking down inside our motorhome at the no-frills Billy Lights Point RV Park, looking across Porter Bay towards millionaire mansions funded by the town's lucrative seafood, agricultural and tourism industries.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Stairway to Locks Well Beach; Murphy's Haystacks near Streaky Bay; Lincoln Cove Marina, Port Lincoln; Locks Well Beach;

ABOVE AND BELOW Revellers at Port Neill's annual Under the Pines festival; The festival is the biggest day of the year for this small town

GOING HOME

So now we're on the run home, unsure how far to drive each day as we travel alongside the calmer waters of the east coast towards Port Augusta. The winds have settled as we've headed north, skirting the Spencer Gulf to Tumby Bay's silo art. Then by happy coincidence, we arrive in Port Neill on the tiny town's biggest night of the year.

After spending all day jumping off the pier with dozens of others, the annual festival known as Under the Pines explodes into life on the grass beneath a row of Norfolk pines opposite the town's one and only pub. The road outside the Port Neill Hotel's front door is closed off to motor traffic so revellers can listen to musicians, shop for crafty offerings or fill their boots with an assortment of food and drinks.

> *“The annual festival known as Under the Pines explodes into life on the grass beneath a row of Norfolk pines opposite Port Neill's one and only pub”*

ABOVE AND BELOW Port Neill Beach; Perfectly formed wave at The Granites, south of Streaky Bay

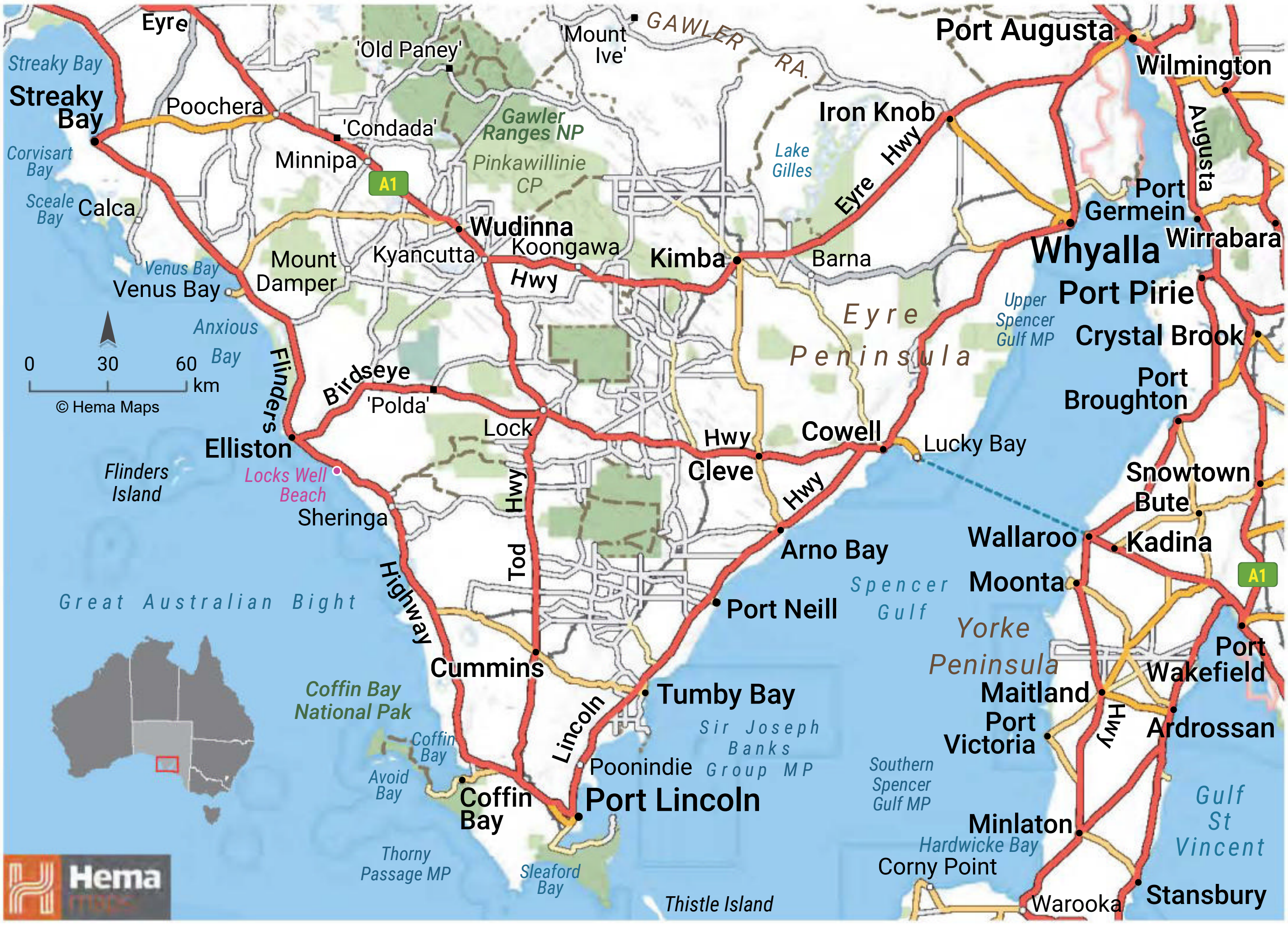
FAST FACTS

Getting there:
Port Augusta, the eastern and northern gateway to the Eyre Peninsula, is 300km from Adelaide, 1000km from Melbourne and 1500km from Sydney. Ceduna, the western gateway to the peninsula, is 1900km from Perth.

Where to stay:
Free campgrounds are scattered throughout the peninsula, though local councils have introduced a booking system and added fees for some of the more popular camping spots, like Perlubie Beach north of Streaky Bay, or Walkers Rock near Elliston. RV Parks in towns like Port Neill allow free camping for self-contained vehicles for up to 48 hours. Two RV Parks attract nominal fees (bookings essential) in Port Lincoln, and there's one beside the Streaky Bay Bowls Club and another at the Elliston Golf Course. Kimba allows free camping at the Recreation Reserve with facilities that are unmatched anywhere else on the peninsula. Campsites in Coffin Bay and Lincoln National Parks must be booked through the National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia website. You'll find private and council-owned caravan parks in Ceduna, Smoky Bay, Streaky Bay, Venus Bay, Elliston, Coffin Bay, Port Lincoln, North Shields, Tumby Bay, Arno Bay, Cowell and Whyalla.

Best time to visit:
Year-round. Temperatures in the Gawler Ranges National Park can be unbearably hot during summer, but for beach holidays there's no better time. Expect windy conditions any time of year.

Further information:
www.eyrepeninsula.com
www.lowereyrepeninsula.sa.gov.au
www.southaustralia.com
www.parks.sa.gov.au


Eyre
Streaky Bay
Streaky Bay
Corvisart Bay
Sceale Bay
Calca
Poochera
'Old Paney'
'Mount Ive'
GAWLER RA.
Port Augusta
Wilmington
'Condada'
Gawler Ranges NP
Pinkawillinie CP
Minnipa
A1
Iron Knob
Eyre Hwy
Lake Gilles
Augusta
Port Germein
Wudinna
Koongawa Hwy
Kyancutta
Mount Damper
Venus Bay
Venus Bay
Kimba
Barna
Whyalla
Wirrabara
Port Pirie
Upper Spencer Gulf MP
Eyre Peninsula
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Birdseye
'Polda'
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Port Broughton
Hwy
Cowell
Cleve
Lucky Bay
Elliston
Flinders Island
Locks Well Beach
Sheringa
Hwy
Snowtown
Bute
Arno Bay
Wallaroo
Kadina
Tod Hwy
Great Australian Bight
Highway
Spencer Gulf
Moonta
A1
Port Neill
Yorke Peninsula
Port Wakefield
Cummins
Coffin Bay National Pak
Tumby Bay
Maitland
Hwy
Lincoln
Sir Joseph Banks Group MP
Port Victoria
Ardrossan
Coffin Bay
Avoid Bay
Poonindie
Southern Spencer Gulf MP
Gulf St Vincent
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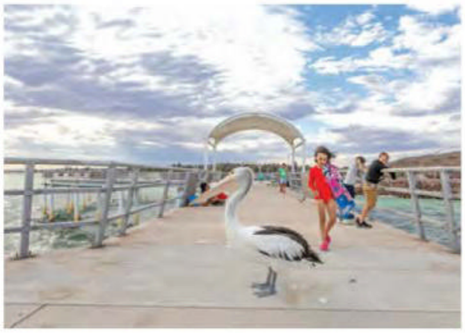
Thistle Island
Warooka
Stansbury
Hema maps



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Woolshed Cave on the Tahlia Caves Road near Elliston; The Tub on the Tahlia Caves Road near Elliston; RVs free camping at the Kimba Recreation Reserve; Whale tail sculpture in Elliston; Whyalla Jetty

> ***"The festival adds a welcome cultural injection to our peninsula visit and is a last hurrah before our final night camped close to Whyalla Airport"***

After dusting off their Sunday-best Wranglers and adding a lick of polish to the trusty RM Williams boots, uteloads of cockies have moseyed into town with high expectations of enjoying a knees-up that's destined to last until the wee hours. And they're not disappointed. The headline act is still rocking long after I drift off to bed just before midnight, feeling utterly exhausted.

The festival adds a welcome cultural injection to our peninsula visit and is a last hurrah before our final night camped in an isolated caravan park close to Whyalla Airport. The town betrays its working-class heritage as an export terminal for the country's first iron ore discoveries and is probably the least 'beachy' place we'd come across. The mining continues at a collection of nearby sites, all of them red dirt hills of some sort or another, and all sharing the telltale 'Iron' prefix in their name.

Like the town, our best days on the peninsula are now behind us. But then again, we can always turn around.

Silver SV Valley
WILDTRAK

FLYING UNDER THE RADAR

Words and Pics **MALCOLM STREET**

The Buckland looks well put together for long-distance travel and doesn't require a heavy-duty tow vehicle.

IN BRIEF

- **6.55m (21ft 5in) tandem axle van**
- **AL-KO™ Rocker Roller suspension**
- **Front island bed**
- **873kg payload**

Silver Valley
Buckland
Buckland

There are a substantial number of caravan manufacturers in Australia. Some of them are very well known and have a strong dealer presence. Others, and there are quite a few of those, tend to fly under the radar. That does not mean the manufacturer produces a bad caravan and many have a firm owner following.

An excellent example of this is Silver Valley Caravans, a family-owned company based in Craigieburn, Victoria. The manufacturer has dealerships in most states but not all, my local one being 7th Street Caravans at Heatherbrae near Newcastle (NSW). Like quite a few manufacturers, Silver Valley has a full order book at the moment, but fortunately for me, there was a Buckland tandem axle model ready to tow away for at least a day or two. The Buckland is part of the Silver Valley lineup, a small range of vans that vary in length from 5.63m (18ft 5in) to 6.55m (21ft 5in) and includes at least one family layout.

STRUCTURAL MATTERS

One of the largest vans in the range, the Buckland, has an external length of 6.55m (21ft 5in). It's a mid door van and one designed very much for on-road use. A look under the van reveals a traditional style of chassis construction. The FP-built SupaGal chassis has 100mm (4in) RHS rails laminated to a 50mm (2in) raiser and a 150mm (6in) RHS drawbar. Consequently, the box section structure has a very substantial look about it. With two freshwater tanks and an optional grey tank, plenty of plumbing work is in the sub-chassis area. It's mostly neatly done and strapped up out of the way. In addition to the water tanks, the other utility items are the mains pressure water connection behind the offside wheels and the two battery boxes mounted on the front offside chassis rail. A benefit of this location is the easy accessibility of the batteries.

At the business end are the usual features: ball coupling, jockey wheel and a pair of 9kg gas cylinders. A mesh basket sits between the drawbar rails.

The Buckland isn't an offroad van but rides very well on the tandem axles fitted with AL-

> “It’s a mid door van *and one designed very much for on-road use*”

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Good fit and finish
- Large bathroom
- Requires mid-sized tow vehicle

CONS

- Microwave oven is a stretch to get at
- Generous internal storage might be too much temptation

KO™ Rocker Roller suspension and there’s still good ground clearance. The 15in alloy wheels have 10in electric brakes.

White ribbed aluminium cladding is standard on the Buckland, and it looks good, in tandem with the lower waistline of black alloy checkerplate. An option for those who desire it is aluminium composite panelling. There are external storage compartments, the tunnel boot across the front and a smaller compartment at the rear offside which would suit a generator.

Electrically speaking, this Buckland is very well equipped with two 105Ah AGM batteries and two 170W solar panels. Along with the gas cylinder capacity, there’s plenty of capacity for off-grid travel.

Buckland
Buckland
Silver Valley

ABOVE AND LEFT Tunnel storage should handle most campsite items; Settling into a calm evening with the Buckland

Silver Valley
Buckland
7thSTREETCARAVANS.COM.AU

ABOVE AND RIGHT Rear-view camera and external shower are standard items; A spacious layout

> "On the first pass, the Buckland interior layout looks much like a host of others. *However, there are a few subtle differences*"

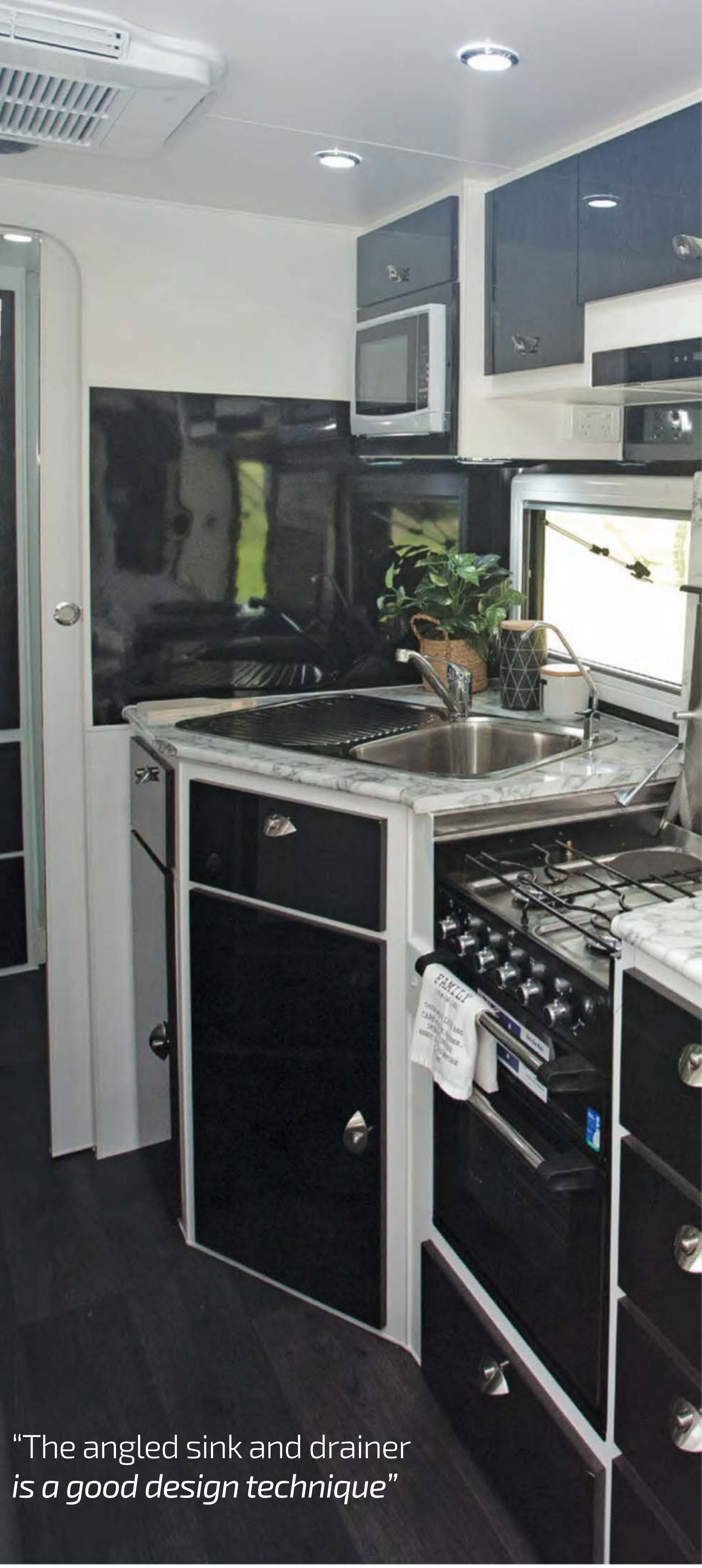
ON THE ROAD

As a towing proposition, the Buckland stacks up quite well. Its ATM of 2960kg and tare mass of 2087kg give a significant payload. Yet a dual cab ute like the Ford Ranger I was using easily handled the van. Lightweight travellers can undoubtedly use the benefit of the 2087kg tare mass to keep well under a towed weight of 3000kg. The rear-view camera and car monitor are standard safety items.

EYE-CATCHING INTERIOR

On the first pass, the Buckland interior layout looks much like a host of other front island bed/rear bathroom layouts. However, there are a few subtle differences, including the rather refined look to the overall finish. One is the angled kitchen bench rather than fully parallel to the wall. The other is the bathroom layout, which is larger than usual and includes an angled shower cubicle. The designers likely liked a few different angles in their caravans. They also picked a black and white colour scheme with a few greys. The glossy laminate finish on the cupboard and locker doors certainly stands out, as does the mottled finish on the bench top. All the cupboard doors are piano-hinged, and metal struts are fitted to the overhead locker doors. Of note are the plentiful light fittings in all the appropriate locations.

Family



SPACIOUS AMENITIES

Indeed, the notable item in the Buckland is the bathroom. As noted earlier, it's pretty spacious. There's enough space on the nearside to fit in the Thetford cassette toilet and the shower cubicle. The angled shower door reduces the space impact of the overall cubicle size but still gives elbow room when showering.

Unlike the typical bathroom layout with a vanity cabinet across the rear, this one sits along the offside wall. Well-kitted out, it has all the essentials, a pedestal wash basin, shelf area, drawers and enough space for a top-loading washing machine. That leaves the rear area for an enormous cupboard, with hanging space and shelves above and drawers below.

KITCHEN FACILITIES

Just like the bathroom, the kitchen is well-sized. Indeed, the angled sink and drainer is a good design technique, improving the general benchtop area and kitchen cupboard space. The four drawers are an asset, and I particularly like the narrow cupboard that is easily accessible from the doorway. There are the expected cooking appliances, a four burner cooktop/grill/oven and the microwave oven above the sink. Its location is a stretch for shorter people. The acrylic splashbacks enable easy kitchen cleaning and there are two double 240V power points for all mains power needs. Across the walkway, the Thetford 185L three-way fridge has an adjacent cabinet with wire basket pantries top and bottom.

"The angled sink and drainer *is a good design technique*"

LEFT AND RIGHT Mid door entry works well; The angled kitchen is a little different

SILVER VALLEY
BUCKLAND

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Body length 6.55m (21ft 5in)
Overall length 8.45m (27ft 7in)
Width (incl awn) 2.44m (8ft)
Height 2.86m (9ft 4in)
Tare 2087kg
ATM 2960kg
Payload 873kg
Ball weight 194kg

EXTERNAL
Frame Meranti timber
Cladding Aluminium ribbed panel (option to upgrade to Composite Panel)
Chassis 150mm (6in) drawbar, 100mm (4in) rails, SupaGal
Suspension AL-KO™ Rocker Roller
Coupling Ball
Brakes AL-KO™ 10in electric
Wheels 15in alloy
Water 2 x 95L
Grey water None
Battery 2 x 105Ah AGM
Solar 2 x 170W
Air-conditioner Houghton Belaire 3400
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control AL-KO™ ESC

INTERNAL
Cooking Swift 500 4 burner, grill and oven
Fridge Thetford 614E.3E 185L three-way
Bathroom Thetford cassette toilet and separate shower cubicle
Hot water Swift 28L gas/electric

PRICE FROM $76,990

OPTIONS FITTED
- Extra solar and battery
- Grey water tank
- Rear generator hatch
- Sirocco fan
- Robe cutouts/USB points
- Water filter

PRICE AS SHOWN $79,990

MORE INFORMATION
7th Street Caravans
11 Clayton Road
Heatherbrae, NSW 2324
P: (02) 4987 5288
W: www.7thstreetcaravans.com.au

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Dinette has multi-fold table; Well-ventilated bedroom area; Pillow cubbies are a handy item

SITTING BACK

The two-seater cafe dinette is very stylishly done, and the leather upholstery certainly looks the part. It's comfortable to sit at as well. A benefit of the wall cushions is that both seat occupants can sit sideways to view the TV on the opposite wall. It's undoubtedly a dinette with a high level of appointment that includes a multi-fold table, footrests, under-seat floor lockers and a small cupboard under the table. Above the table are power sockets for the full range – 240V, 12V and 5V USB.

BY NIGHT

Well-ventilated is an excellent way to describe the bedroom area. In addition to the large roof hatch and ceiling-mounted Sirocco fan, there are large windows on either side and the nearby entry door. The standard-sized mattress (1.88m x 1.53m) is surrounded by the usual cabinetry which is very functional and includes pillow cubbies and a shelf under the overhead lockers.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
It's not the cheapest van on the block but it offers plenty of value-packed features

TOWABILITY
Doesn't require a large tow vehicle

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
On-road tourer with facilities for staying off-grid

BUILD QUALITY
Overall finish looks quite good

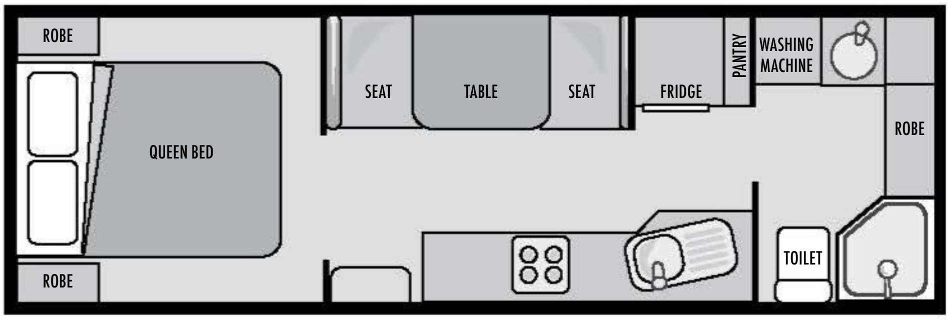
LIVEABILITY
Room for two without a problem

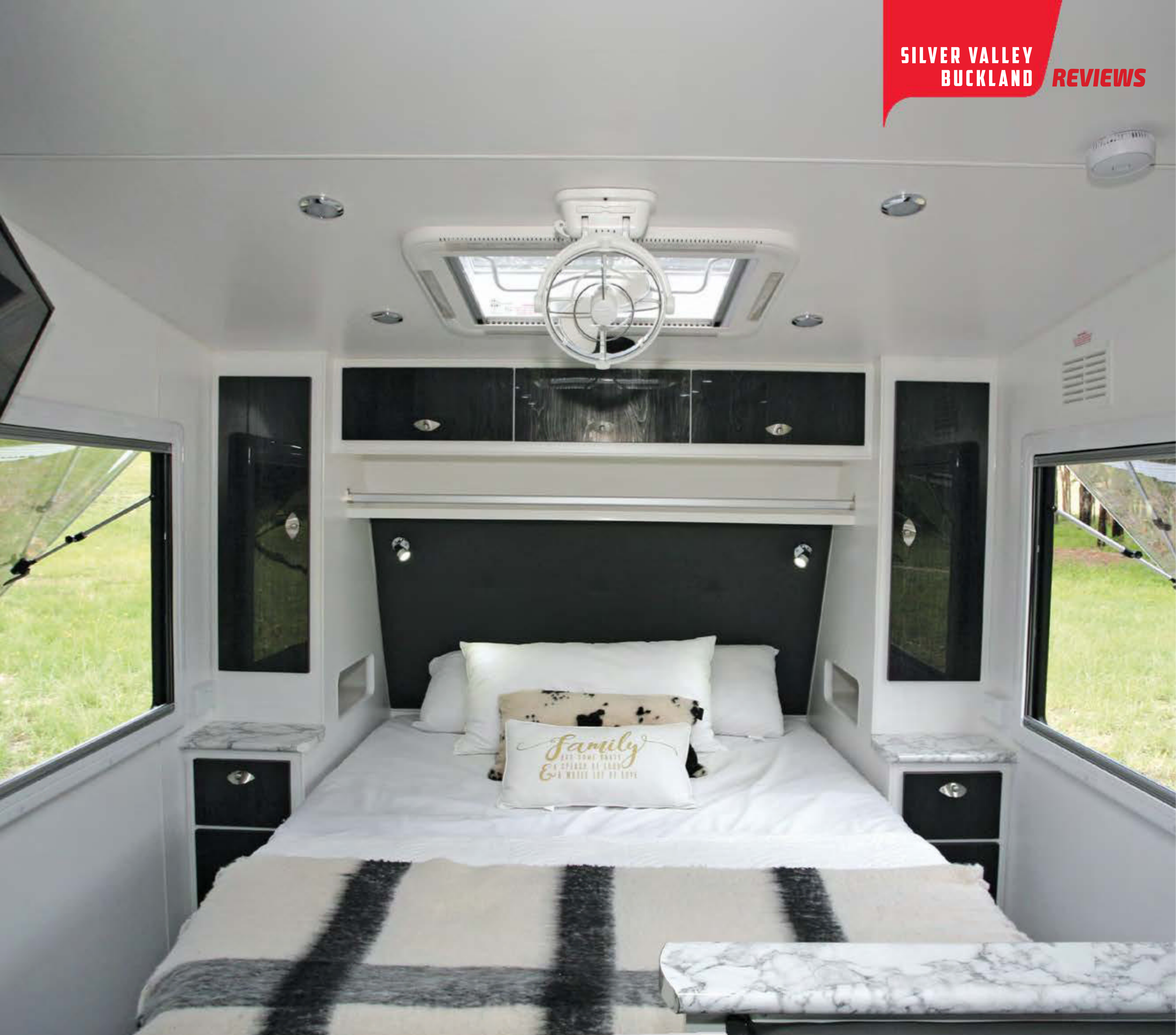
SELF-SUFFICIENCY
Being fitted with a grey tank and good battery/solar capacity, its self-sufficiency is excellent

CUSTOMER CARE
Factory offers a two-year warranty and the usual for OEM components

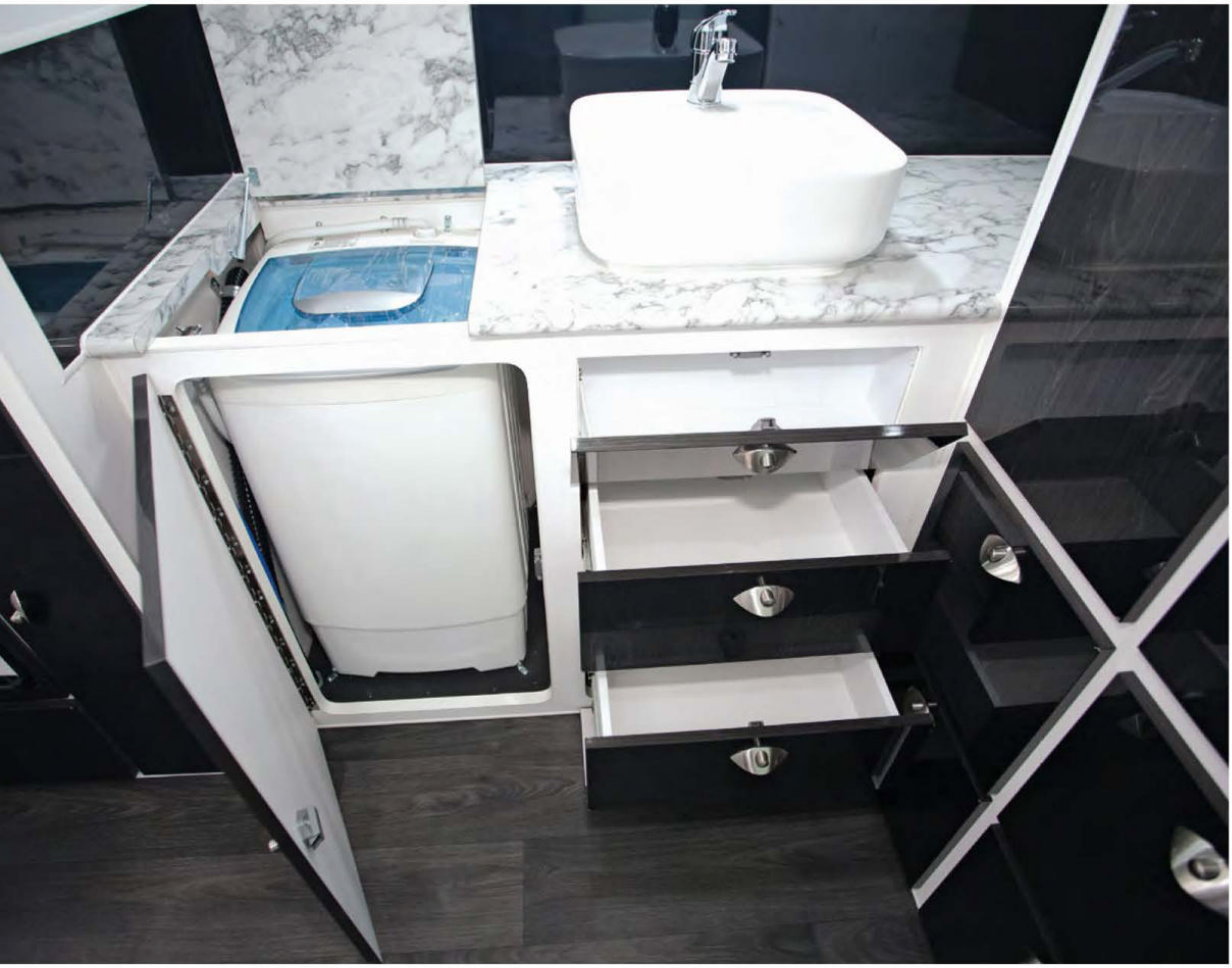
INNOVATION
Several subtle layout design features which make a difference

X-FACTOR
Larger bathroom with a different arrangement





> “The two-seater cafe dinette *is very stylishly done*”



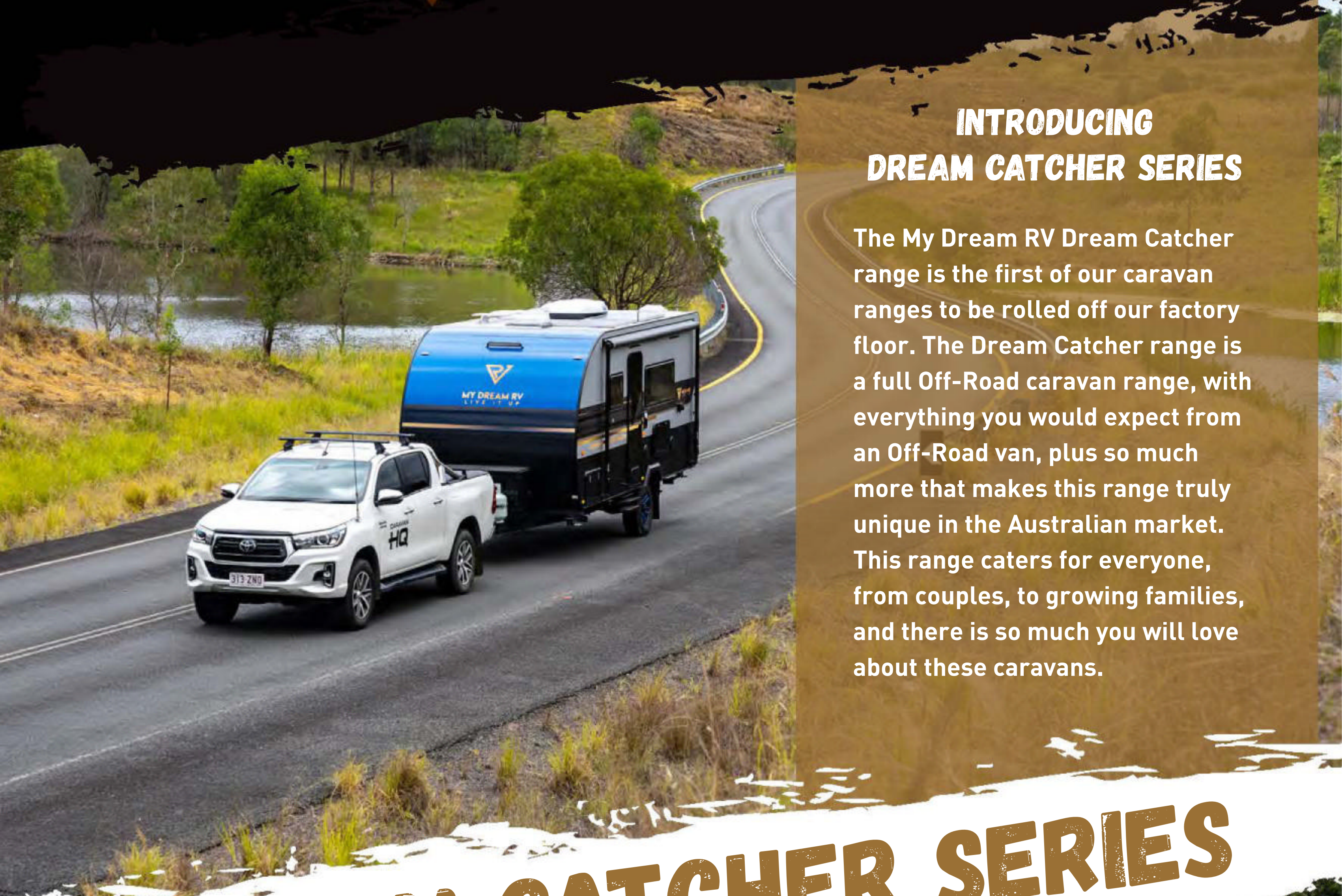
> “The Buckland looks well put together *for long-distance travel*”

THE BOTTOM LINE

There’s much to say about this van. It does have a fairly standard layout, yet there are enough variations to make a difference. The Buckland looks well put together for long-distance travel and doesn’t require a heavy-duty tow vehicle. On top of all that, the extra battery and solar panel capacity is suitable for camping without mains power but there isn’t the extra weight that accompanies a van built for offroad travel. Given that there are plenty of places in Australia to explore without going offroad, that’s a good idea.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Roomy shower cubicle; Top loading washing machine included; The Thetford cassette toilet is tucked into the corner but easily accessible

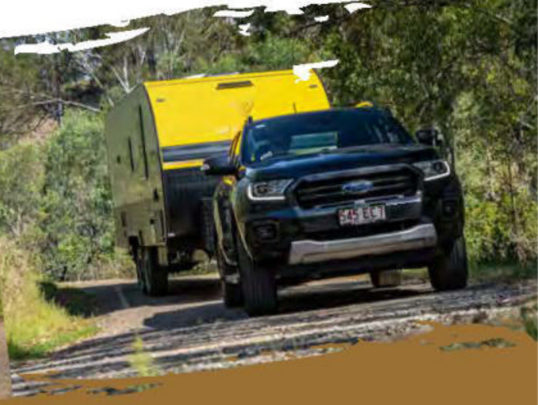
MY DREAM RV
LIVE IT UP



INTRODUCING
DREAM CATCHER SERIES

The My Dream RV Dream Catcher range is the first of our caravan ranges to be rolled off our factory floor. The Dream Catcher range is a full Off-Road caravan range, with everything you would expect from an Off-Road van, plus so much more that makes this range truly unique in the Australian market. This range caters for everyone, from couples, to growing families, and there is so much you will love about these caravans.

DREAM CATCHER SERIES



available at:
CARAVAN HQ

mydreamrv.com.au

SHOWING OFF IN MELBOURNE

Words and Pics
John Ford

Editor-at-large John Ford delved into the latest offerings from the Victorian Caravan, Camping and Touring Supershow held in Melbourne in February.

$99
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BARRIER ORGANISER

ON THE MOVE
CARAVANS
TRAXX
ON THE MOVE
HQ

Along with some 48,000 hardy souls, *Caravan World* Production Editor, Amelia Mansell, and I weathered the heat and wind of the Melbourne Showgrounds to investigate the latest offerings of nearly 80 RV manufacturers. The Victorian Caravan Industry Association has been organising a caravan show since 1953, and its 70th event had entertainment and displays aplenty.

Most manufacturers have been under the pump delivering their backlog of orders, so there were few new models on display in this first event of the 2023 Australian Caravan Show circuit. But as well as caravans and campers, there were more than 200 exhibitors, with many accessory suppliers continuing to bring new ideas. With show-goers always after a bargain or new idea, the halls of caravan-related products were doing brisk business.

In what may be a sign of the times, several dealers had vans available for immediate delivery or with shorter lead times than we have seen in the past two years. And while some of the usual suspects, such as New Age and Snowy River, were absent, a few new full-height imports were starting to show their stuff. This trend will likely grow if the camper trailer/hybrid segment is an indicator.

Jayco's floor space was immense. It was a welcome shady area under the showground big top, and it looked like every model van and motorhome was on display. The 2023 models showed refinements, with the All Terrain vans getting anti-lock brakes and the option of a 440Ah lithium battery and 3000W inverter. In addition, the Silverline has a new exterior look with stylish decals and changes to the rear-end mouldings. The 19ft 6in All Terrain retails at $88,790, so it's a good option for those wanting to travel rough tracks while keeping to a sensible budget. Jayco was offering a $3000 saving as a show special on the 19ft6in All Terrain.

> "The Victorian Caravan Industry Association has been organising a caravan show since 1953, *and its 70th event had entertainment and displays aplenty"*

ENERDRIVE
DOMETIC
BIG4 HOLIDAY PARKS

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The accessory hall was doing a brisk trade; Caravan HQ now owns the On the Move brand; Goodies on the MSA stand

OFFROAD COMPACTS

I liked that there were a lot of builders opting for smaller single-axle vans. Only some people want or can afford a monster van and a big truck to move it. Design RV has a Forerunner 188-F in a family bunk layout with an east-west couple's bed and bunks opposite an ensuite at the back. This layout shows what you can do with some thought in a compact 18ft van, and at $69,990, it looked like value.

Cub's C-16 is a tidy 'go anywhere' van in the true offroad tradition. It's small and narrow enough to get into secluded campsites yet has enough battery power and water for off-grid living. The 2T tare weight includes a practical ensuite, and the 700kg payload should transport all your supplies.

Caravan HQ has bought the On The Move brand and had vans on display for immediate delivery at sale prices. I liked the look of a 17ft 6in TRAXX version for $96,990, a saving of $10,000 on retail. Another rough road model from Atlantic, the 17ft 6in Endeavour, was $71,420 drive away with a $4000 saving.

Great Aussie Caravans is a company that is growing into a Melbourne powerhouse. It's probably the only builder offering the choice of timber, aluminium or composite construction. Its new Striker 156 is a narrow, full-height van destined for extreme offroading. Built on a 3T TuffRide suspension, it has internal and external kitchens, an ensuite and decent self-sufficiency. Its $99,990 price tag puts it at the upper end of vans for its size, but it looks like an exciting prospect for a couple keen on adventure travel.

Red Centre is making waves online and getting a lot of support from happy owners. Its great-looking 18ft Gibb boasts an aluminium frame and a 2.7T ATM with a 550kg payload.

Vacationer had a small van with a difference. The club lounge in its 18ft 6in Bantam is a clever design for a single-axle van. The price was $123,747.

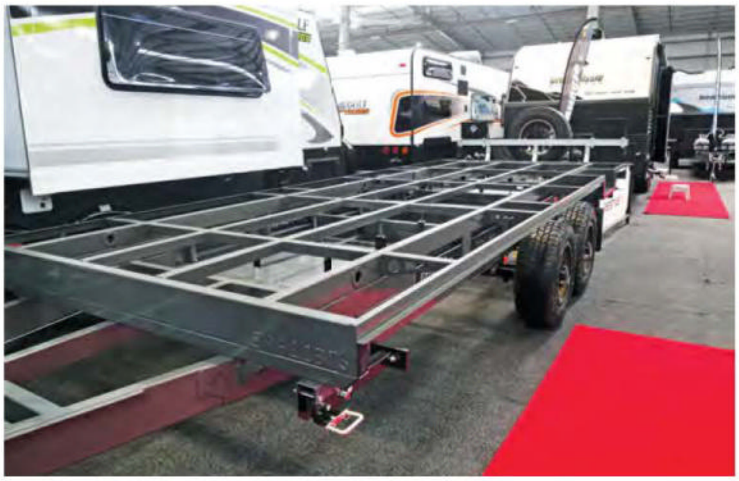
Urban Caravans had an extensive range of vans, but the little Armorlite stood out if you were looking for a lightweight and easily towed offroader. Its narrow track and robust independent single-axle suspension will get you places a big van can't.

As we have come to anticipate, Highline unveiled some bright new colours on its tough offroad vans. I particularly liked the bold wild horse logo on the aptly named Brumby model.

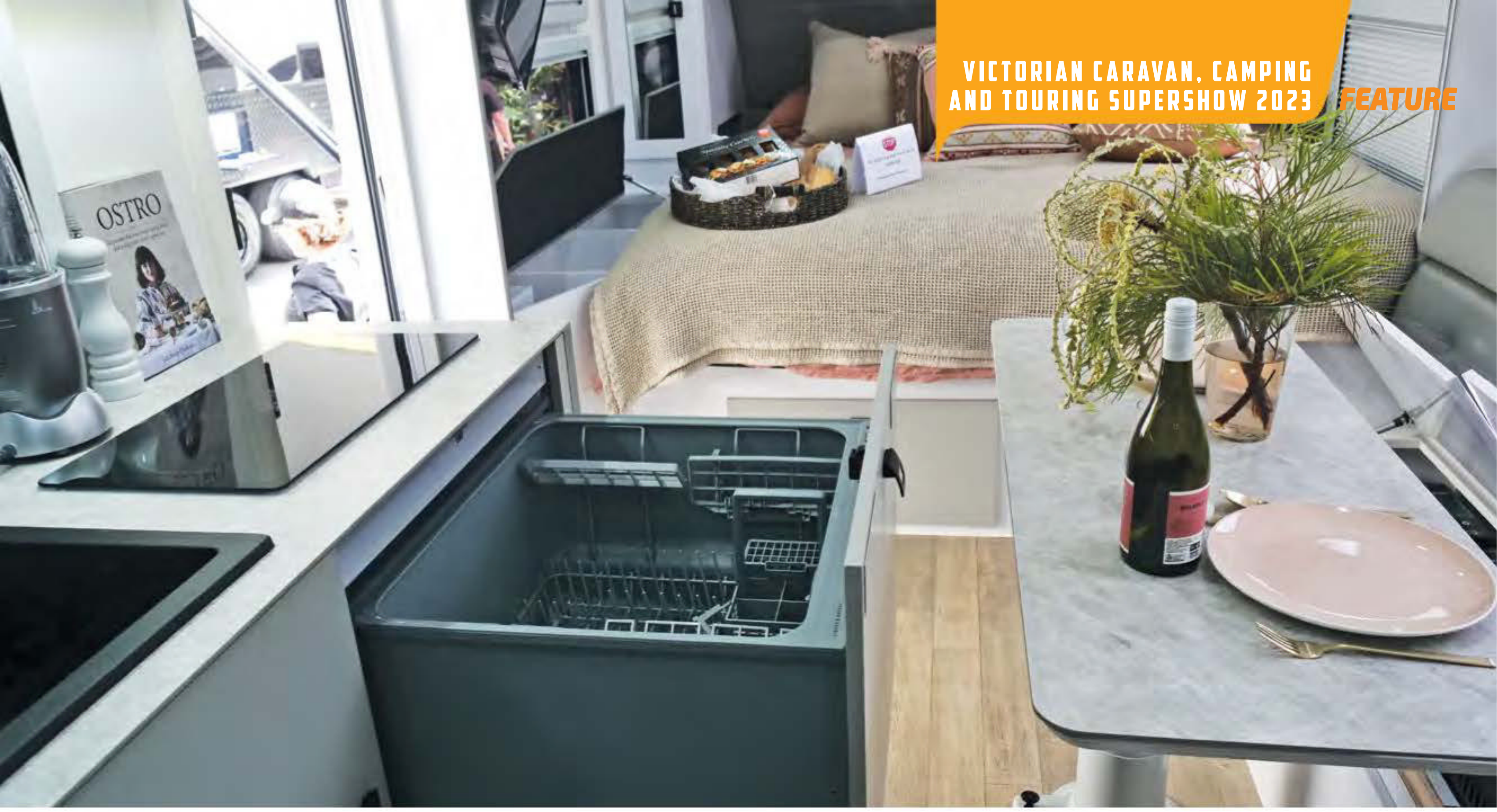
> "I liked that there were a lot of builders *opting for smaller single-axle vans*"

URBAN
URBAN CARAVANS
OFF-ROAD ALUMINIUM FRAME TIG WELDED

Great Aussie
Great Aussie



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Great Aussie Caravans' truss chassis; Great Aussie Striker 156; The CUB C-16 caravan; The Urban Amorlite



ABOVE AND BELOW A dishwasher comes with the all-electric package from Wonderland: Destination Unknown's big rig at the Titanium stand

STYLISH OFFROADERS

Innovative Melbourne builder Wonderland displayed an impressive number of vans and a new model featuring a dishwasher as part of an all-electric package. That might be a first for an Aussie van, and it highlights the benefits of upgraded battery power.

The Masterpiece construction method uses its R-TECH, which employs a polyurethane Fibroplast framing system instead of the traditional timer. A very stylish 21ft Dynamic offroader had a big side club lounge with a sale price of $116,950.

At the Nova stand, the Family Escape attracted admiring glances over the contemporary mix of dark furniture with lighter-coloured timber table and benchtops. The 20ft version starts at $91,490, with the display model optioned with offroad goodies and ample off-grid living for $100,990.

One of the brightest coloured vans at the show came from Malibu. The orange 21ft offroader seemed well equipped with AL-KO Enduro suspension on a 6in G&S chassis and had been reduced to $75,500.

Another van from Great Aussie Caravans is the Xplora 216 Tribal – a family van with an aluminium frame and a new-style ladder truss chassis with a flat floor.

You can trust Royal Flair will come up with innovative ideas, and the Eco Mate 19ft 6in is a van that transforms family living. A club lounge at the back converts to a queen bed when the bed is lowered. It's an idea that has been around in the motorhome sector but is rarely seen in caravans. Up front, the bunks are wide nooks opposite a north-south ensuite, and they have loads of room that teenagers will love. Up top, solar panels slide out for extra sun power when parked. Full points for innovation.

TITANIUM CARAVANS
TITANIUM CARAVANS
TITANIUM

Mountain Trail had a complete set of its current range on display. They are great-looking offroad vans that buck the trend of flashy colours and high checkerplate. The brand was among the first to move to full electric, and we like the timber-free construction and composite body.

Provincial had a 22ft offroad family van available for immediate delivery, and at $102,990, it seemed good value. I liked the family layout with a central ensuite to divide the living spaces, with the bunks set east-west across the back. There was loads of storage and a decent size lounge and kitchen.

Legend has recently brought all sales in-house and introduced an upmarket 21ft 6in Groundbreaker in an off-grid offroader with a luxury interior. The aluminium frame body and heavy-duty chassis are solidly built, and the roomy club lounge and central ensuite should be a winner. Priced at $158,990.

Willow was another brand to boast a drop-down bed. The Waratah is a spacious family van with good bench space and a robust composite construction on offroad suspension. Priced at $102,559, it will attract families looking for a reliable rough road capable van.

The Titanium stand had its teams from Destinations Unknown and On Track to show off their awesome outfits. Dozens of interested buyers lined up, and sales looked brisk for these capable offroaders.

TOURING VANS

The Safari Delta was $78,990, which in today's market is a lower-end price point for a van of its size. But it came with an island bed, club lounge and basic solar and battery power for limited off-grid living.

Goldstream celebrates its 30th year in business in 2023, and its tandem axle 1860 has been a popular choice. Starting at $69,990, it has tandem axles and room for a couple to tour the blacktop or option it to a capable offroad rig that can be towed by most medium size four-wheel drives.

If you like the idea of travelling light, the EcoTourer might appeal. The folding roof design is aerodynamic, and the range starts with an ATM as low as 1470kg. The new offroad version looks like a good compromise for those wanting the room and ease of use of a van and the practical size of a camper.

Essential's C-Class is a modern-looking slide-out with a roomy and well-finished fitout. Priced around $91,800, it seems like a good prospect for those looking for a more upmarket van.

GOLDSTREAM RV

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Goldstream display; Inside the Safari Delta; The interior of Essential's C Class; The EcoTourer

> "If you have a chance to catch up with a caravan show near you, my advice is to take some lunch, ***spend the day and explore the big range of vans and van stuff on offer***"

ACCESSORIES FOR TOURING

MSA's range of touring equipment keeps on growing. Alongside the expanded selection of towing mirrors, it had funky storage options for cargo barriers and spare wheel covers. I liked the new cooking utensils set with a sturdy chopping blade, all engraved with the MSA logo.

Cruisemaster debuted its new M60 monotube shock absorber that adjusts for a firmer or softer ride. Designed to improve the ATX suspension, the piggyback reservoir has 74 per cent more oil volume for better cooling and durability. It will be released for sale in late 2023.

NEC has introduced a new range of 12V smart televisions for the RV market with all the latest connectivity and sharp image quality. The new 42in version uses minimum power and is a good mix for big vans. The latest slide-out kitchens are stylish and well-made. NCE is the distributor for the OzX Corp battery system, and it was good to see its display showing all the components that are usually hidden inside or under the van.

Dometic had a new electric rooftop tent that deployed in only a couple of minutes and its new range of colourful coolers was also a hit.

The HYDRACELL Aqua Pro lights are a great idea for emergency lighting for campers and boating. Aluminium Flashlight is a high-power aluminium LED flashlight powered by a proprietary HC2D water-activated battery fuel cell and it lasts for up to 200 hours once activated in water. Shelf life is said to be indefinite.

As well as its range of mirrors and other accessories, Clearview had really useful and good-looking electric side steps for four-wheel drive vehicles. They lower when the door is opened and lift out of the way when the door is closed.

Autophix demonstrated its full-function scan code readers suitable for most vehicles. The plug-in screen monitors engine, transmission, ABS and airbag systems as well as reading and clearing fault codes. It's a cheap way to keep on top of what's going on under the hood at around $329, depending on the model.

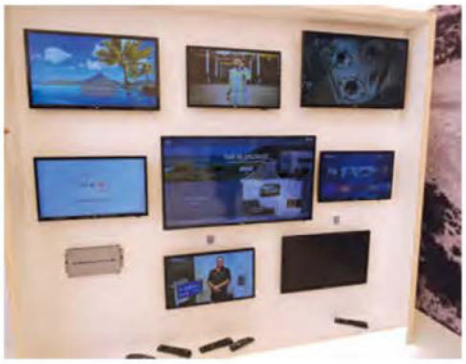
The young team at Solid GPS have released a new tracker with a 12-month battery life. This Australian product is growing in popularity for keeping track of your expensive equipment in a compact, easily hidden device.

Spartan Innovations released a prototype of an innovative bolt-on wheel hub in what may be a game changer for the caravan industry. Said to last for 200,000km, the components are designed to take the worry and maintenance issues away from the current systems. The release is expected in July 2023.

And of course, our sister company Hema was selling maps, guidebooks and navigators to a keen crowd of happy campers. If you have a chance to catch up with a caravan show near you, my advice is to take some lunch, spend the day and explore the big range of vans and van stuff on offer. You might be surprised what you will find.

Accessories PAVILION
Hema
Prepared to explore.
autophixaust

HYDRACELL
AQUA PRO
SHARK
XT
OUT



Solid GPS Trackers
SOLID GPS

CLOCWISE FROM LEFT Solid GPS Trackers; NCE has a new range of TVs; Aqua Pro flashlights; The busy Hema stand; The new Cruisemaster shock absorber

Words and Pics John Ford

SOMEBODY STOP ME

It's all well and good cruising down the highway on a sunny afternoon, van in tow and your favourite tune blasting out, but if you can't bring things to a stop quickly, then you could be in trouble. So, it made a lot of sense when Bendix suggested it was time to upgrade the brakes on my trusty but well-travelled 100 Series LandCruiser.

ULTIMATE 4WD
UPGRADED
Bendix

ULTIMATE
4WD
BRAKE HOSE
Bendix
BRAKE ROTOR WIPES
BHK043R

CLEANUP
BRAKE & PARTS CLEANER
Bendix
DOT 3
HIGH PERFORMANCE BRAKE FLUID
DANGER
CERAMASIL BRAKE PARTS LUBRICANT
NET WT 250g
BRAKE CLEAN ROTOR WIPES

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The Bendix kit comes in a handy reusable esky; The kit has everything you need; Kit components

In stock form, the 100 Series brakes aren't all that impressive. It has discs on all four wheels, which is good, but I've never been happy with the stopping power compared to more modern vehicles. And as we tow a large van, the idea of better equipment to slow the rig was very appealing.

Some aspects of modifying your vehicle need to be addressed. For example, fitting bigger tyres puts more pressure on your braking system. As a general guide, if you increase the radius of your wheel and tyre combination by 10 per cent, the extra braking force needed to bring the vehicle to a halt safely will also be around 10 per cent.

Bendix has developed model-specific sets for the most popular 4WDs. Our kit included a longer brake line for the central connection to the rear, new braided lines, new discs and upgraded pads all round.

ABOVE TO BELOW Back off handbrake; Old vs new parts; The old brake disc exposed

> “Having dedicated 4WD metallurgy *also means there are no performance compromises*”

Bendix introduced the upgrade kits to suit the demands of offroading and the extra performance needed when towing a big van. According to Bendix, a key benefit of their offroad performance disc rotors is the adoption of 4WD specific metallurgy, which increases rotor strength at elevated temperatures while also providing high wear resistance – this increases overall rotor durability and reduces the chance of warping when very hot. Having dedicated 4WD metallurgy also means there are no performance compromises.

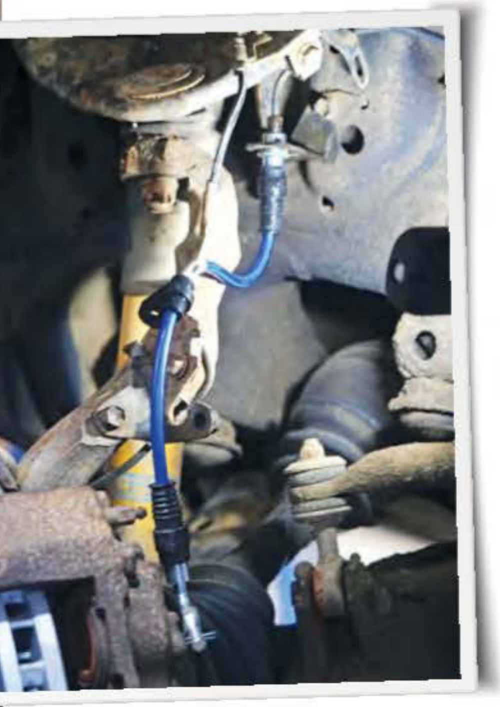
Bendix's Diamond Tip Slot technology achieves additional braking performance in this range. This feature uses specially designed slots and V-shaped dimples on the rotor surface to efficiently expel gases, dirt and water. The system also keeps the brakes primed for the next corner or descent. By using dimples at a precise depth rather than holes, greater braking power is achieved while retaining the strength of a solid rotor.

A part of vehicle maintenance that is sometimes overlooked is the brake lines. They are ultra-important – to the extent that they are one of the most regulated components of a vehicle, needing to meet a

CERAMASIL BRAKE PARTS LUBRICANT

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Rear hub regrease bearings; Parts lubricant; New front discs in place

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Front disc in place; New braided lines; Bleed the system



> "The car felt like it had more grip, *and the stopping power improved"*

range of government standards. Most vehicle manufacturers don't have set schedules for replacing brake hoses, so they should be inspected visually during vehicle servicing and by feeling the hoses with the hands to pick up any potential cracks or deformities that are out of sight. So, replacing the lines after years of hard travel is prudent.

Again, according to Bendix, their Ultimate 4WD brake hoses are constructed from PTFE (Teflon®) tubing, which is then covered by woven stainless steel 304 braid and finished with the Bendix blue protective layer that further safeguards the braid from dirt, dust and grime.

And finally, the Bendix Ultimate 4WD Disc Brake Pads are engineered to partner slotted rotors, are manufactured with Bendix premium Mechanical Retention System (MRS) with their newest, most high-tech ceramic formulation, and provide a low dust and low noise user experience with Bendix's highest performance specialised 4WD brake pad system.

Brakes are a critical safety system for a vehicle. The brake system should not be interfered with by anybody who does not have the appropriate skills and experience. Bendix recommends that a qualified mechanic should carry out the brake upgrade, so rather than crawl around under the car, I took the LandCruiser to Squizzy's Automotive near home.

The kits come packed in a bright blue reusable cooler and a handy plastic storage bin. Straight to the poolroom! As well as the rotors, pads and lines, you also get Heavy Duty Brake Fluid, Ceramasil Brake Parts Lubricant, Brake Cleaner and Rotor Wipes, so the job's right to go.

The changeover took around three hours, which included removing some recalcitrant bolts and well-embedded lines. There's a photo sequence hereabouts to give an idea of the process. Still, there's nothing like a well-equipped workshop and tradesman experience to get the job done.

Before the changeover, we ran some tests to get an idea of the new system's effectiveness. On a safe bit of backroad, I braked several times from 60km/h, and the stopping distance was around 11m.

After a few days of familiarising myself with the feel of the brakes, I did the same stopping test. The car felt like it had more grip, and the stopping power improved. Consistently, stops were now around 9m. Bendix research suggests around 20 per cent shorter braking distance at 100km/h, so my results are consistent with that.

But the main positive is that I feel more confident that things are as they should be. Coming down descents like Victoria's Talbingo Mountain can be a big test of caravan braking. Even in lower gears, the brakes get a good workout.

The cost of the Bendix upgrade is $1195 for the front and $650 for the rear.

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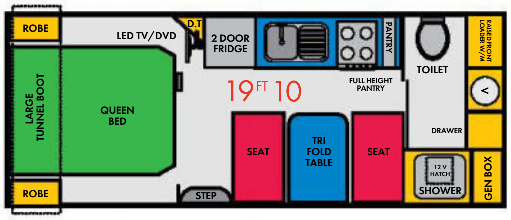
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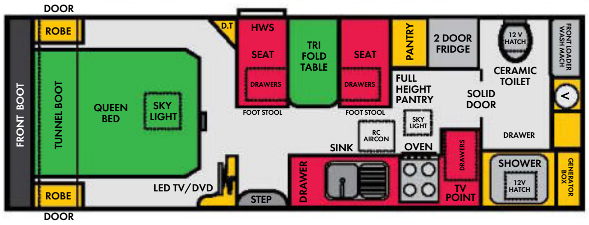
DOOR
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FRONT LOADER WASH MACH
FRONT BOOT
TUNNEL BOOT
QUEEN BED
SKY LIGHT
FOOT STOOL
FOOT STOOL
FULL HEIGHT PANTRY
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SKY LIGHT
RC AIRCON
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OCEANIC
NO ENTRY

MAKE IT MANDURAH

Western Australia's seaside city is brimming with colour and unexpected outdoor delights.

Words **JULIA D'ORAZIO** *Pics* **JULIA D'ORAZIO AND SUPPLIED**

ABOVE Mandurah waterway (Image Tourism WA)

Mandurah is all about going with the flow. You can hardly escape the sight of water and it doesn't need much to encourage an active lifestyle. Western Australia's coastal city is bound by nature with vast waterways, soaring jarrah lands, calm beaches, autumn-coloured wetlands and rare rock-like thrombolites. Its cute mascot, the Indo-Pacific dolphin, animates the city's charm.

Located just 70km south of Perth, the state's largest regional city is considered an extension of the west coast capital. If Perth is unhurried, Mandurah is in a permanently relaxed state. Like its bigger sister, it has a wealth of unique outdoor activities; however, its abundant wildlife makes it almost sinful to sit idle. With the minimal drive or boat time required to reach pristine surroundings, exploring is borderline effortless. The city's waterfront cafes, restaurants, bars and winery scene are just as enticing.

A burgeoning arts scene complements its natural assets. Much colour and character are peppered throughout with state-of-the-art sculptures, wooden fairy tale giants and 'crammable' art trails. Yes, Mandurah thrives; it's a city that has undergone an illustrious transformation in the past few years. At the crux of it, Mandurah is a great add on to any Perth visit and appeals to all kinds of water babies, nature lovers and pleasure-seekers.

Enter water world

Mandurah is every bit the definition of a water world. The coastal city is in the heart of the Peel region, with its prized blue jewel, the Mandurah Estuary and Peel Inlet. It's rare to discuss the area, also known as the Peel-Harvey Estuary, and not acknowledge its enormity: it's more than twice the size of Sydney Harbour. This quiz night-worthy fact is something that tour guides and locals love to mention.

The complex waterway stretches 134sq km and is a hodgepodge of environments: shallow estuarine and saline waters, freshwater and brackish lakes and world-recognised wetlands. The Murray and Serpentine Rivers, which connect to the Indian Ocean via the artificial Dawesville Cut, feed into the waterway. It's little wonder the waterway attracts more than 100 native and migratory bird species from as far as Alaska: an extra long-haul flight over 13,000km. With its sheer size and different sceneries, it's easily understandable why almost all the fun happens on or nearby water.

Before I came close to anywhere near the seaside, I checked into the Mandurah Caravan and Tourist Park. The park offers powered concrete slab sites, some with private bathrooms, and unpowered grassed sites. It is a quirky place to call home with its fusion of Balinese and Tiki decor around the park, such as lion statues and wooden huts. It offers a slice of island life off the main drag, Pinjarra Road. From here, it's a 10-minute drive to the city centre, where real adventures await.

ABOVE Mandurah Estuary (Image Visit Mandurah)

Take me to the river

I bid farewell to the mainland to get my bearings in this southern city. Mandurah offers multiple excursions to experience its calm waterways, including jet skiing, novelty eco barbecue boats, scenic day cruises and a longer stint on a houseboat. Okay, I needed to be more game for the first option, but a day voyage to the Murray River provided a good insight into life on the water.

Locally owned Mandurah Cruises offers affordable lunch cruises from the town centre to the mouth of the Murray River. It is considered the state's most historically rich, utilised by Indigenous people and European settlers.

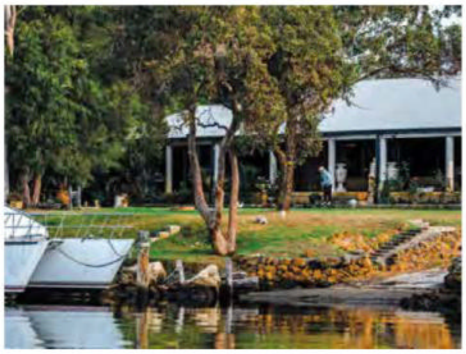
Lasting 4.5 hours, it passages 'Dolphin Highway' along the Mandurah Estuary and passes red-tinged Samphire Creery Wetlands and Channel Island Nature Reserve. Bird lovers would appreciate the cruise, with plenty of bird sightings along the way. Exotic birds fanning their wings toward the sun is a common sight. So too are a bevy of black swans bopping along calm waters.

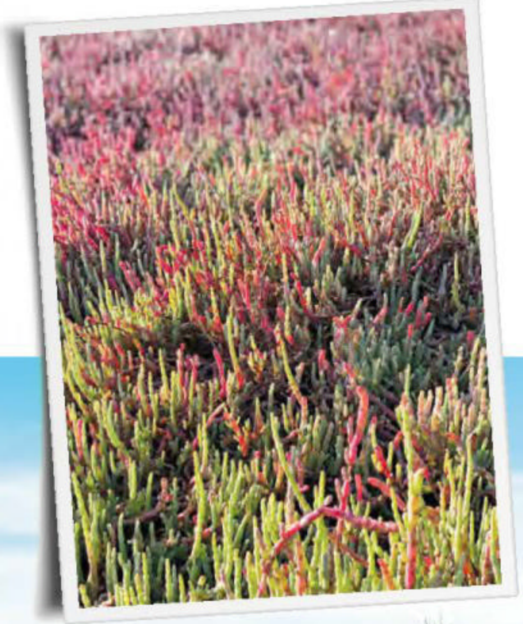
It's not all about staying afloat, as we had a chance to step back in time to visit Coopers Mill. Accessible only by boat, the far-flung heritage-listed stone windmill at the tip of Cooleenup Island dates to 1846 and is a striking reminder of the area's agricultural legacy. Further up the banks of the river are houseboat moorings and homes dwarfed by looming jarrah forests. Its rural surroundings and modest houses starkly contrast the other seaside residences Mandurah is most famous for.

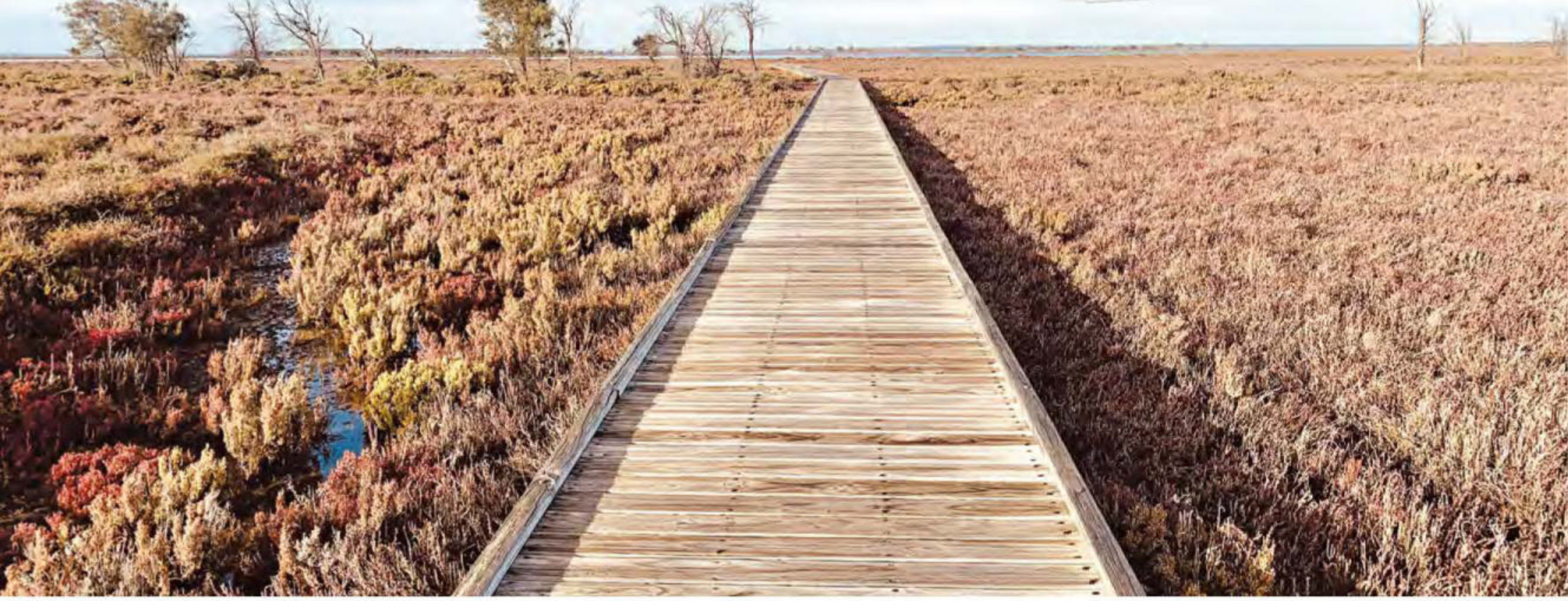
Getting caught up in window shopping for dream real estate is easy. Mandurah's famous canals are lined with mansion after mansion, with the most opulent million-dollar-plus manors boasting a private jetty to make the most of a picturesque location. Residents can cruise on a whim, spot passing dolphins, go fishing and cast a net for a Mandurah speciality – blue swimmer crabs – just off their doorstep. What a life.

Speaking of making the most of a good locale, come Christmas time, these canals are illuminated by what has become a city tradition, the Mandurah Christmas Lights. Canal residents go big by decorating their homes with excessive lights and festive displays. The area beams as bright as a mini-Las Vegas, with the neon spectacle reflected on the water, making it a glitzy affair. Night cruises operate over the festive season to make the most of the magical sight.

> ***"If Perth is unhurried, Mandurah is in a permanently relaxed state"***







CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A beautiful walk through the Creery Wetland Nature Reserve; Murray River (Image Visit Mandurah); Creery Wetland Nature Reserve

Artful trails

Mandurah may be big on nature, but its cultural scene is just as alluring. In recent times, the city has added artistic flair to its waterways. A dedicated Instagram Trail features 12 installations along Mandurah Ocean Marina, Mandurah Estuary and Mandjar Bay. Each artwork is distinct, some gimmicky and made for capturing, while others offer a place for reflection.

The Mandurah War Memorial along the western foreshore is one of those to encourage contemplation. A series of white pillars convey the soldiers' courageous crossing into conflict. Another one that provokes a sense of place is the foreshore's newest icon, The Meeting Place. Mandurah's latest marker fuses the city's past and present by exhibiting timber remnants of the Old Mandurah Bridge, encircled by an immersive eight-metre-tall contemporary sculpture. The circular structure projects sound and a multicoloured LED light show (at night) responsive to the estuary's current.

Other snap-worthy attractions include the new Kwillena Gabi Estuary Pool along the eastern foreshore. The circular pool's name translates to 'Dolphin Waters', with a chance of seeing dolphins from this unique public pond high. Another architectural marvel to make the trail is Mandurah's version of the Venetian canals. Named after its European inspiration, it boasts a scenic lifestyle framed by modern high-rises and beautiful arched bridges.

The trail also features impressive 3D-illusion art paintings on public walls and floors, made for Instagram life-size frames and mural art – artworks to capture a selfie.

"Mandurah may be big on nature, but its cultural scene is just as alluring"

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Santi Ikto – one of the Giants of Mandurah; Seba's Song (Images Visit Mandurah); Kwillena Gabi Estuary Pool (Image Tourism WA)

A giant adventure

Dolphins are not Mandurah's only endearing residents.

Late last year saw the arrival of the Giants of Mandurah by Danish artist Thomas Dambo. The 'world-leading recycle artist' designed five fairy tale-like wooden giants as a free outdoor exhibition across Mandurah's various sceneries. Unfortunately, one giant, Vivi Cirkelstone, got burnt with a replacement soon to come. The giants are up to five metres tall and made with disused pallets and timbers. Like a fairy tale, spotting these doe-eyed residents involves a bit of adventure.

The whereabouts of these colossal characters are an exciting mystery to solve. Grab a map from the Mandurah Visitor Centre for a self-guided expedition to discover these giants in 'secret locations'. There's a message behind the fun run-around, with each discovery promoting sustainability with treading the giant's surrounding environments respectively.

Need help to crack codes? There are ways to dispel the mystery. The Bike Kiosk, next door to the visitor centre, offers a fun way to visit two giants – Santi Ikto and Seba's Song – on a guided e-bike tour. Trust me, it's worth opting for an e-bike to conserve leg power. I felt immersed in a storybook as I cycled from one guardian of the sea to the next, passing through extraordinary scenes. The tour covers slightly over 30km and skirts coastal bushlands in Halls Head, the channel's tip and through native bush corridors. It's nothing short of enchanting.

Savouring a taste of Mandurah

Another surprise about Mandurah is discovering its little-known winery scene.

Kaleidoscope Tours runs intimate tours in the region, including all-day winery tours to showcase the region's fine drops. At the helm is former South African safari guide Paula, who joked, "Instead of taking people to the wild, we get wild." She didn't need to

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Enjoy the open mezzanine at Peel Estate Wines; Peel Estate Wines rustic cellar door (Images Visit Mandurah); A tantilising taste at Lake Clifton Winery

do much to garner enthusiasm. The tour makes three pitstops to the region's secreted vineyards and a hearty brewery lunch stop.

Northern Geographe winery, Vineyard 28, offers a taste of Italy with Italian-style wines, with speciality drops such as light dry red Nebbiolo and table red Dolcetto. The palette is sure to be cleansed at Lake Clifton Winery. This cleverly hidden vineyard is different from your average wine producer. It offers a range of fruit wines and funky concoctions. Unique blends include ginger, mango, and pear wine, all akin to a liquid dessert.

The tour also includes a stop at the Peel region's oldest vineyard, Peel Estate Wines. The award-winning vineyard's rustic setting and cellar door mezzanine overlooking aged wine barrels make it an enchanting visit. A drop of its delectable Zinfandel equally matches its warmth and cosiness.

LEFT AND BELOW Mandurah's own Venitian-style canals (Image Tourism WA); Mandurah War Memorial (Image Visit Mandurah)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Mandurah resides on Gnaala Karla Booja country with the traditional custodians, the Binjareb people. It was first named 'Mandjoogoordap' (now known as Mandurah), which translated to 'meeting place of the heart'.

"The award-winning vineyard's rustic setting and cellar door mezzanine overlooking aged wine barrels make it an enchanting visit"

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT Thrombolites in Yalgorup National Park (Image Tourism WA); Pelican sightings; Mandurah Cruises (Images Visit Mandurah);

FAST FACTS

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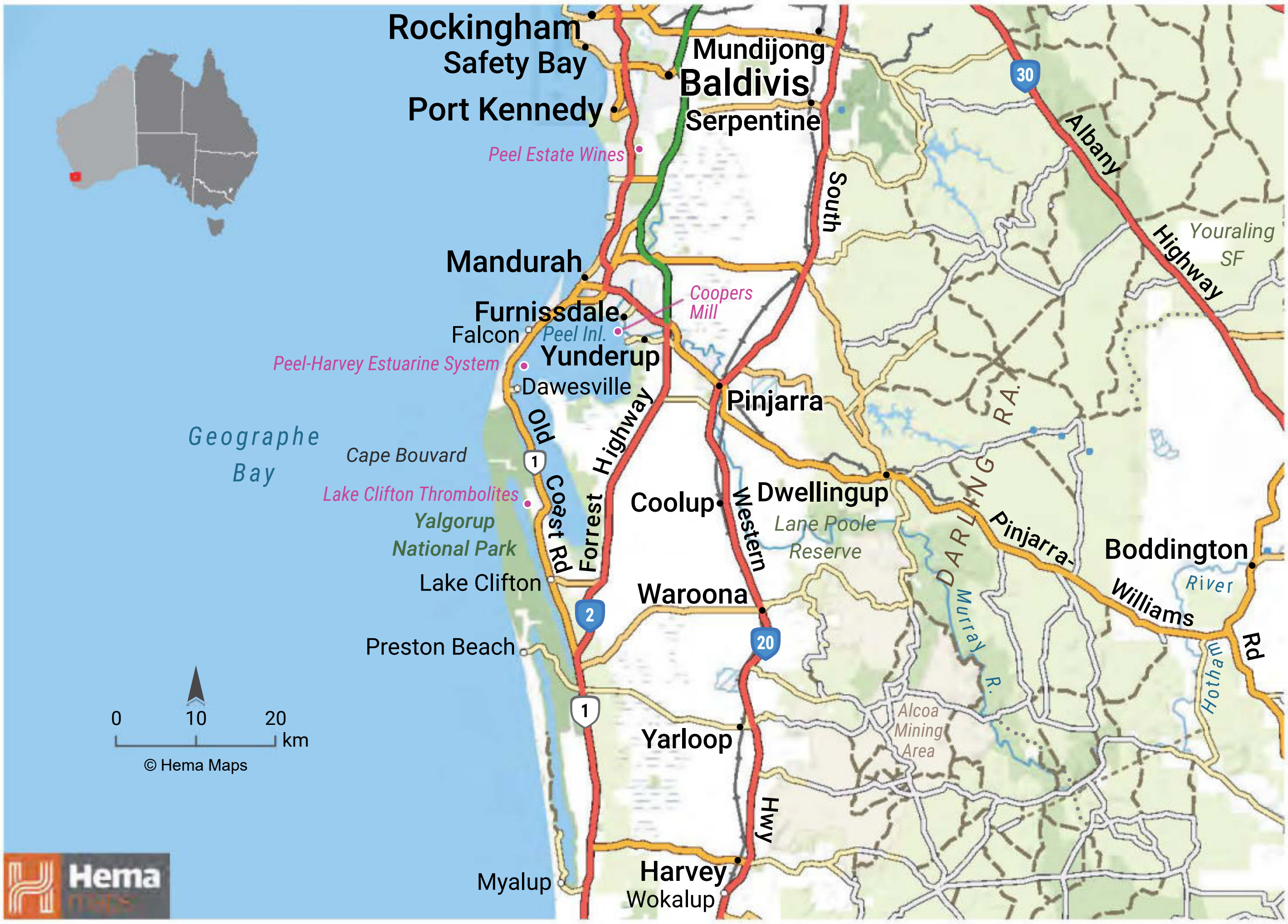
E: reception@mandurahcaravanpark.com.au
W: mandurahcaravanpark.com.au

Kaleidoscope Tours
P: 0404 754 777
E: paula@kaleidoscopetours.com.au
W: kaleidoscopetours.com.au

Mandurah Cruises
P: (08) 9581 1242
E: reservations@mandurahcruises.com.au
W: mandurahcruises.com.au

The Bike Kiosk
P: (08) 9513 1707
E: enquiries@thebikekiosk.com.au
W: thebikekiosk.com.au


Rockingham
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Port Kennedy
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Albany
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Mandurah
Coopers Mill
Furnissdale
Falcon
Peel Inl.
Peel-Harvey Estuarine System
Yunderup
Dawesville
Pinjarra
Geographe Bay
Cape Bouvard
Old
Coast Rd
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Highway
Forrest
Lake Clifton Thrombolites
Yalgorup National Park
Lake Clifton
Coolup
Western
Dwellingup
Lane Poole Reserve
DARLING RA.
Pinjarra-Williams Rd
Boddington
River
Hotham
Murray R.
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It's not all about tasting the finer things in life, as we came full circle to appreciate Mandurah's beauty spots. The tour includes a visit to Lake Clifton Thrombolites in Yalgorup National Park. Thrombolites, a series of rounded rock-like growths in shallow waters, are one of Earth's earliest life forms, some dating roughly 570 million years. These Mandurah residents are considered relatively young, however, around 2000 years old. It's easy to observe these rockstar retirees by taking a stroll along the boardwalk that extends over the lake.

Mandurah covers a range of nature-based attractions, including wooden giants, living rocks and rolling vineyards against a tranquil backdrop – no wonder it delights on all fronts.

> ***"Mandurah covers a range of nature-based attractions, including wooden giants, living rocks and rolling vineyards"***

IN BRIEF
- Sensible size for remote travel
- Robust chassis and aluminium frame
- Beautifully finished and has a roomy interior

Words and Pics
JOHN FORD

LITTLE BIG VAN

Titanium's mid-size offroader is the right mix of size and amenity to get you into remote places without compromising living space.

DO NOT OVERTAKE TURNING VEHICLE
TITANIUM CARAVANS
HARDCORE
CARAVANS COFFS COAST
PROLINE CHASSIS

> “*Jason is at the helm these days,* and the company operates from a purpose-built and very modern 500sq m factory in Melbourne’s north”

LEFT The Hardcore 18'6 is robust and ready for adventure

Expectations are always high when we roll up to the Titanium dealer in Coffs Harbour for a review of one of their vans. We are usually on a mission to somewhere further north, and the stopover in the mid north coast NSW city is a great place to break up the journey. On top of that, I know the van will be well-presented and ready for a drive to a unique photo location that Andy and the Caravans Coffs Coast crew have chosen.

The dealership is a dedicated offroad caravan business, and the crew is keen on travel and adventure. The team is also dedicated to the presentation of the vans, which is hard to beat, and I'm convinced this attitude flows over to their customer care.

THE COMPANY

Titanium is one of those Melbourne builders challenging the usual suspects in the Queensland offroad market for a place at the top of the tree. The company has been building vans since 2012 when father and son team Joe and Jason Grech began making offroad vans from a small factory. They moved away from timber to aluminium frame construction eight years ago to ensure their vans are more robust and durable. Over time, the vans continue to evolve based on feedback from owners, the dealers and the duo's own R and D out in the bush.

Jason is at the helm these days, and the company operates from a purpose-built and very modern 5000sq m factory in Melbourne's north. The move to the new factory last year generated massive investment in high-tech machinery to increase production and quality.

Titanium maintains strong links to younger, big-truck aspirationals through its links with Aussie Destinations Unknown. Jason is a hands-on caravanner with his own large family van towed by a big Ford F Series ute, in which he escapes from the factory when he can. And while these larger combinations of big tow vehicles and big vans attract much attention, the Titanium range includes models for more moderate – some might say more practical – adventures, including the 18'6 Hardcore reviewed here.

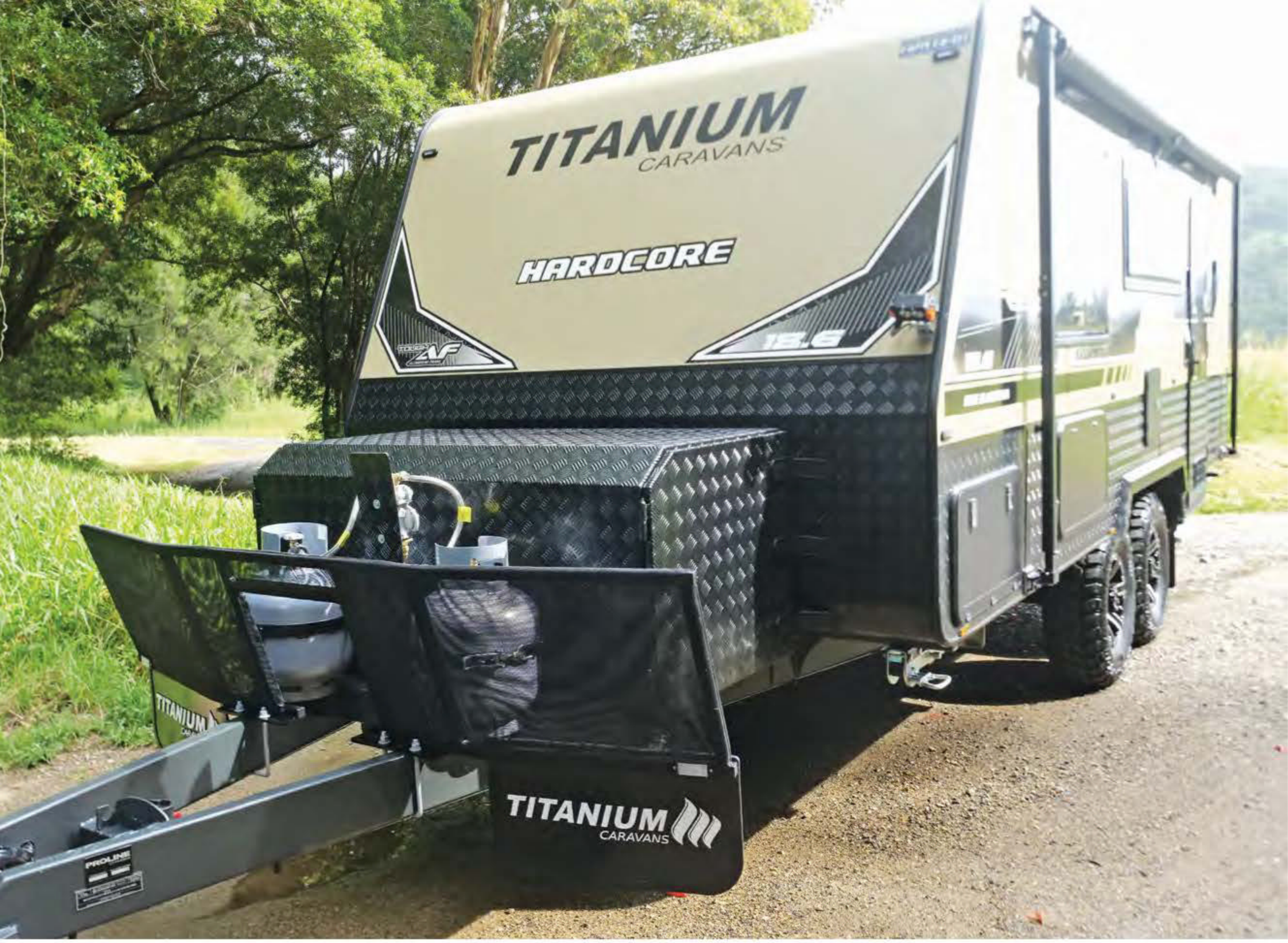
MEASURING UP

PROS

- Stout engineering and high-end build quality
- Well-crafted interior fitout
- Sensible size for a couple to tackle long trips

CONS

- Long lead times for delivery



TITANIUM
CARAVANS
HARDCORE
18.6
CARAVANS
COFFSCOAST

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE A single spare sits on the back; A full-width stone-guard offers plenty of protection; Plenty of external storage up front

> "The van on review is a Hardcore model, which sits in the middle of Titanium's range, *all with sturdy construction and aluminium frames*"

THE BUILD

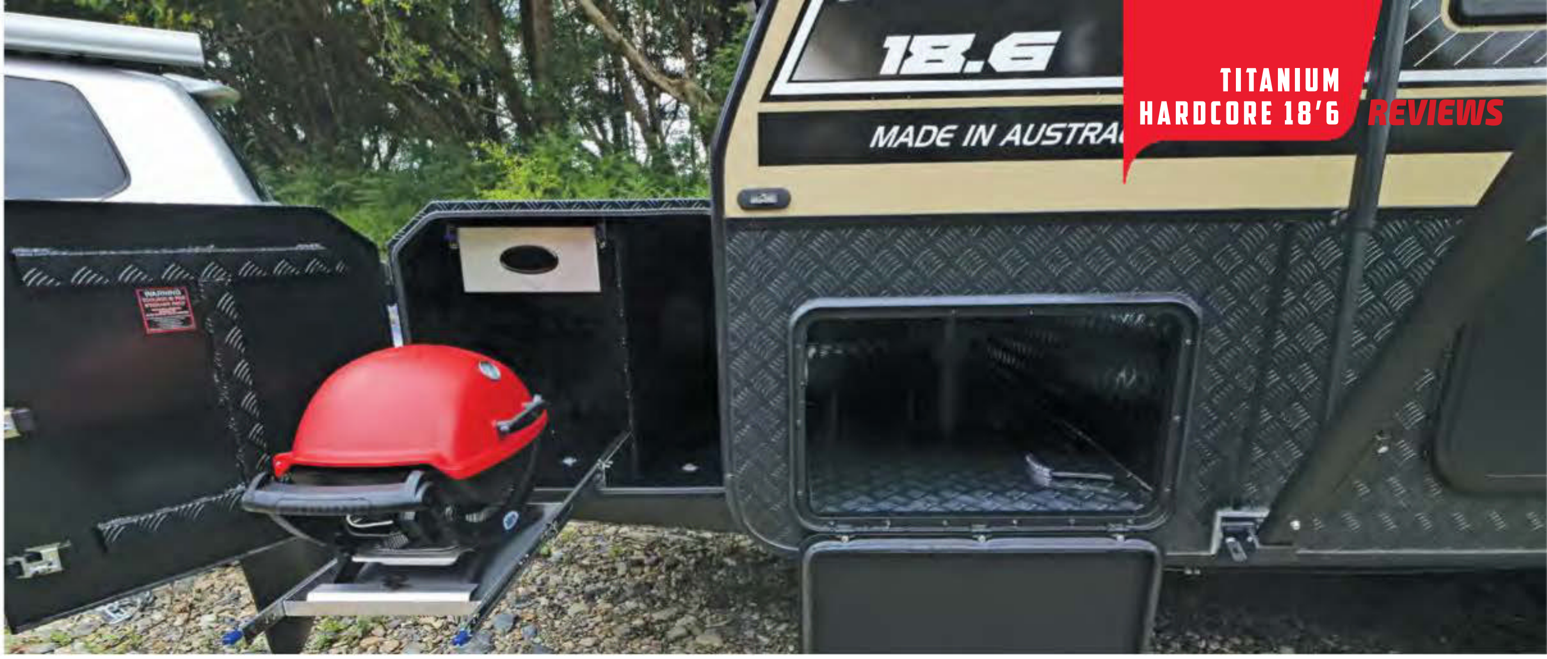
Laminated twin beam 100 x 50 RHS make up the super rigid and durable 200x50mm chassis. It's built by Proline from Australian steel with SupaGal coating inside and out to give excellent protection and save many kilos on a hot-dipped version. The 150x50mm extended A-frame connects to the tow vehicle through a DO35 hitch.

The suspension is Cruisemaster's tandem trailing arm independent system with coils rated to 3700kg. Stopping power comes from 12in drum brakes with discs an option. Set under the chassis, there's a good supply of freshwater in 170L and 85L roto-moulded poly tanks. An extra 85L tank collects grey water when camping in national parks.

Up top, the frame is Henrob rivetted 25mm aluminium C-section, which offers a lightweight and rot-free construction with just enough flex to avoid cracking over extreme terrain. The walls and roof form an integrated structure with efficient foam insulation in the voids. The roof is single piece composite fibreglass and PIR Foam 32mm thick panel, while the walls are a 25mm interlocked aluminium frame clad in a 3mm aluminium composite and high skirts of checkerplate for protection from flying stones.

The furniture is all CNC cut and interlocked for uniformity and a robust and close finish. The fittings are made from lightweight ply and include high-quality gas struts and metal-sided, soft-close drawers.

The van on review is a Hardcore model, which sits in the middle of Titanium's range, all with sturdy construction and aluminium frames but with different levels of offroad ability. It's a full offroader, missing out on some of the equipment of the top-end ATX, but with a $40,000 price advantage.



THE EXTERIOR

The high ride, swathes of checkerplate and chunky tyres leave no doubt this is an offroad van. The purposeful look is enhanced by the light-tone Sandstorm colour of the body and a set of tasteful dark graphics. The all-over impression is a van with pleasing, well-balanced lines that make a good compromise for ease of towing and liveability. A full-width stone guard protects two 9kg gas bottles and a full-size toolbox at the A-frame. Rather than a kitchen in the caravan body, which would steal vital storage space in this mid-size van, you get a slide-out barbecue on the passenger side of the toolbox while leaving room for plenty of storage and a generator slide.

Along the side, a checkerplate-lined full tunnel boot adds to storage options, and there's a single picnic table and weatherproof opening to the entertainment hatch for power and TV leads. The Menace wheels have a modern look with chrome and black spokes, while big 285 x 75 x 16 mud terrain tyres add some punch to the picture. An orange and white exterior light discourages insects, and the full-length awning brought welcome weather protection on the drizzly hinterland afternoon.

A single spare tyre sits on a three-arm bar at the back, with space and engineering for a second one if needed. A mid-height work light will be handy.

SLICK INTERIOR DESIGN

It's a fair step up on a single tread to get you inside. The neat-looking new-style Aussie Traveller three-way door has black security-

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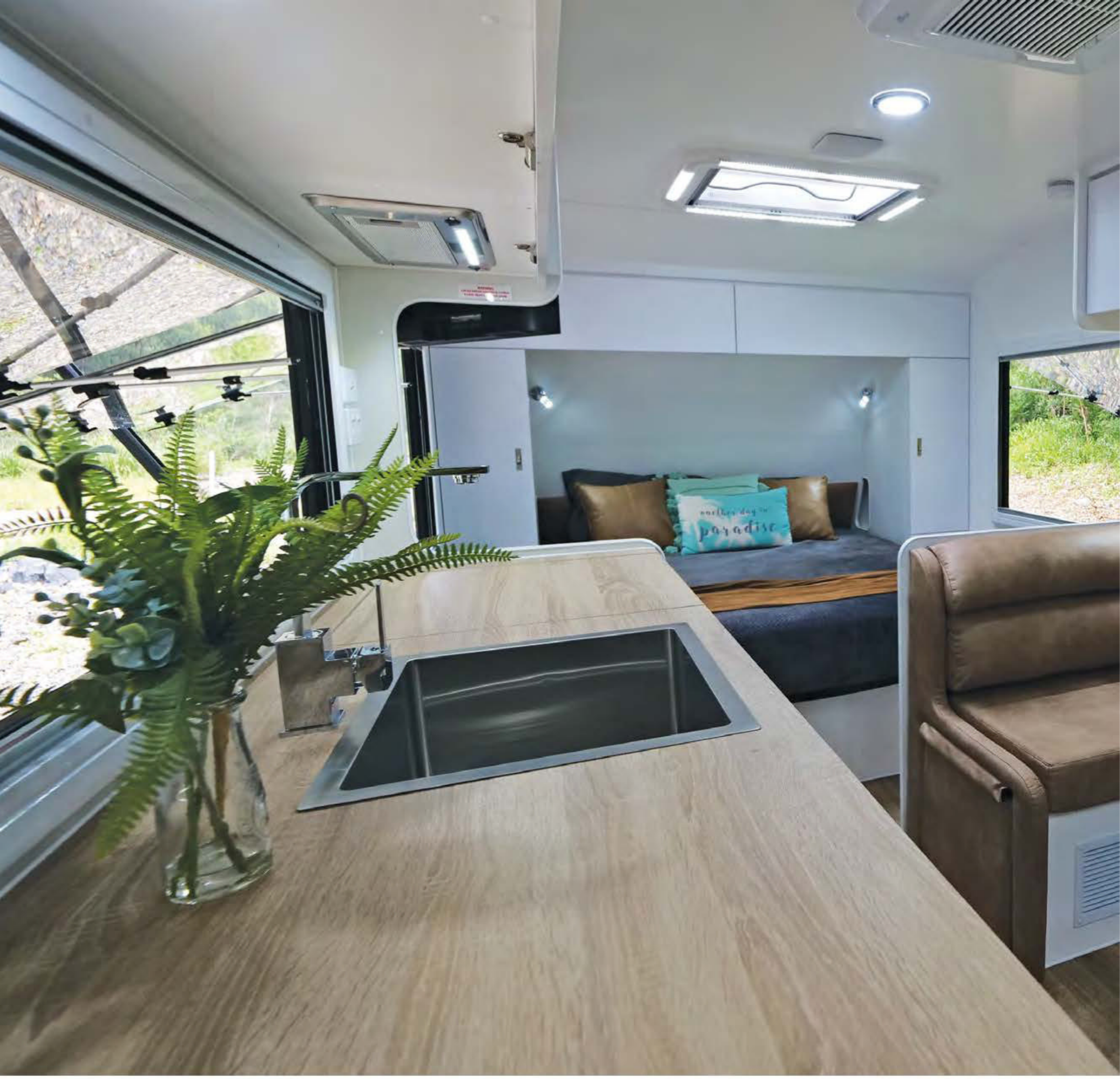


> "The decor is a fresh and inviting choice *of contemporary design*"

style mesh and folds backwards, so it doesn't block the kitchen window.

Colour choice of the interior is inspired. Light Scandi green tones on the furniture mix with warm Bardolino Oak benchtops and a plush Eastwood Fawn of the Warwick fabric of the dinette. This decor is a fresh and inviting choice of contemporary design, but you can go your own way from a broad colour pallet on offer.

The layout includes a rear-entry and front-bedroom design that hits the sweet spot for most couples. It gets the bed away from the door for privacy and gives easy access to the ensuite from the outside. The central living space has the kitchen on the passenger side, where food can be passed through the window for outside dining. The driver side accommodates the cafe dinette and a good size 224L compressor fridge.

The kitchen has decent preparation space, especially with the cover over the oven folded down. A square chrome sink has a high colour-coded mixer with a freshwater tap built in, which is not a standard inclusion for the Hardcore. The cooker is a full oven, but you can option extra pot drawers instead if preferred, and an NCE microwave sits in a row of overhead cupboards. A clever extra is a small nook at floor level where you could

LEFT Enjoy the best of both worlds with this luxurious interior design

store some wine in a usually wasted spot.

You will find everything you need in the ensuite in a more compact version than larger versions. There's an 8in difference in the size of the ensuite compared to a 19ft 6in van, so buyers have a choice of a larger ensuite or the more compact overall benefits of a smaller van. My preference is a moderate size ensuite, and as I said, this one has everything you need. The shower is a separate one-piece unit, the vanity has a large mirror and cupboard, and a washer is fitted alongside the toilet.

Beautifully upholstered and plush material covers the cafe dinette, and there's just the right amount of padding to be comfortable and seat extensions to spread out. Under the threefold table is a small cupboard against the wall, while a pair of USB fast chargers and 240V points will be handy for charging equipment.

The caravan queen island bed is 6ft 2in with innerspring, with good access from either side. Side nooks have more USB charging points, and large windows bring ample light and ventilation. A reverse cycle air-conditioner and two Aussie Traveller roof hatches are up top.

TITANIUM
HARDCORE 18'6

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Overall length 8.35m (27ft)
External body length 5.64m (18ft 6in)
External body width 2.46m inc awning (8ft)
Travel height 3.10m (10ft 2in) to the top of the AC
Internal height 2m (6ft 6in)
Tare 2652kg
ATM 3500kg
Payload 848kg
Ball weight 172kg

EXTERNAL

Frame Aluminium
Cladding Premium 3mm Composite
Chassis 8in steel, 4in x 4in laminated beam, with a 6in A-frame
Suspension Cruisemaster XT coil and DeeMaxx disc brakes
Coupling DO35
Brakes DeeMaxx Disc Brakes
Wheels 16in rims and 285/70 MT tyres
Water 255L freshwater, 85L greywater
Battery 200A Enerdrive Lithium with 40A DCDC Charger
Solar 600W
Air-conditioner IBIS 4
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control Not available with disc brakes
Kitchen Optional

INTERNAL

Cooking Three gas and one electric cooktop, grill and fan-forced oven
Fridge 224L Dometic Compressor
Microwave Yes, no turntable
Bathroom Full ensuite, separate shower and toilet
Washing machine 3kg wall mount
Hot water 28L stainless steel gas and electric

OPTIONS FITTED

All standard options fitted to review van

PRICE AS SHOWN $133,400 (Registered and delivered in NSW)

MORE INFORMATION

To enquire about this caravan, please visit www.caravanscoffscoast.com.au or phone Caravans Coffs Coast 02 6652 5523

ABOVE AND RIGHT The Hardcore 18'6 has a more compact bathroom; A rear entry and well-sized living area

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
In the current market it's a good value for this top-end van

TOWABILITY
As good as it gets for the weight of a twin axle setup. Well balanced and showed no pitching or sway

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
Those looking for a van that's easy to tow and with space for comfort will enjoy the Titanium 18'6 Hardcore

BUILD QUALITY
It's hard to find any fault with the way the van is put together. A tough van with great levels of finish

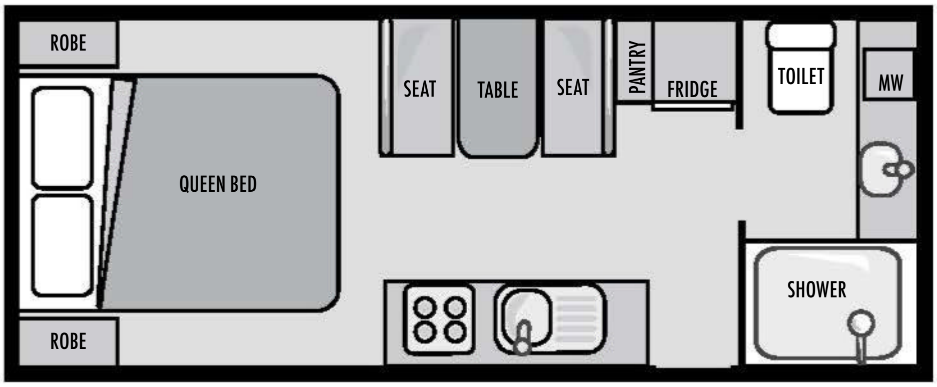
LIVEABILITY
It's got everything most people would want and need

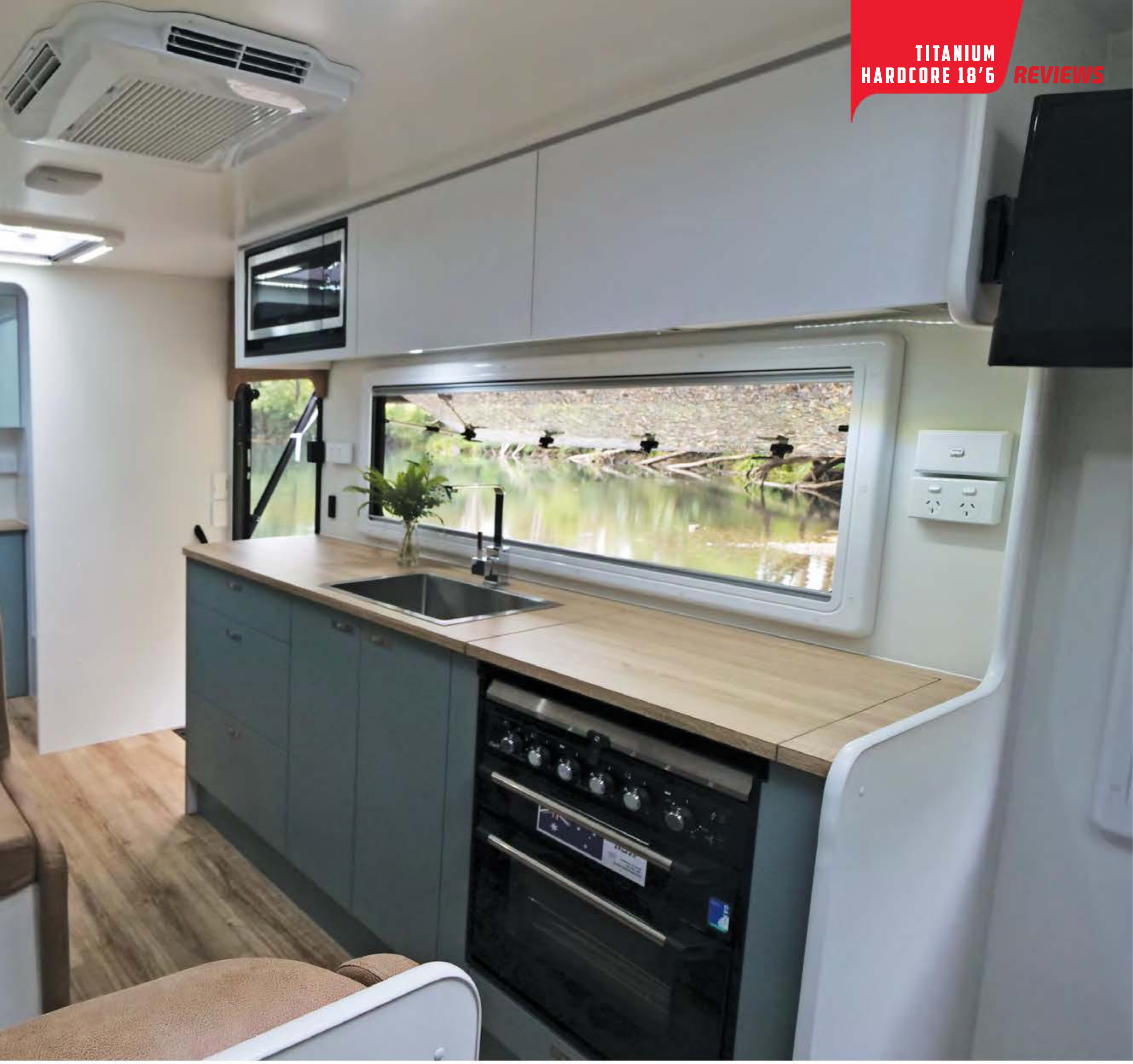
SELF-SUFFICIENCY
Sufficient for most couples. Could use more solar and battery capacity if travelling in southern states in winter

CUSTOMER CARE
The Titanium and Caravans Coffs Coast teams are dedicated to getting it right the first time and fixing anything that slips through

INNOVATION
Gradual evolution of a good thing. Ideas like the low-level wine storage show a keen eye for improving the product

X-FACTOR
Looks stunning and the interior colours are a standout





OFF-GRID LIVING

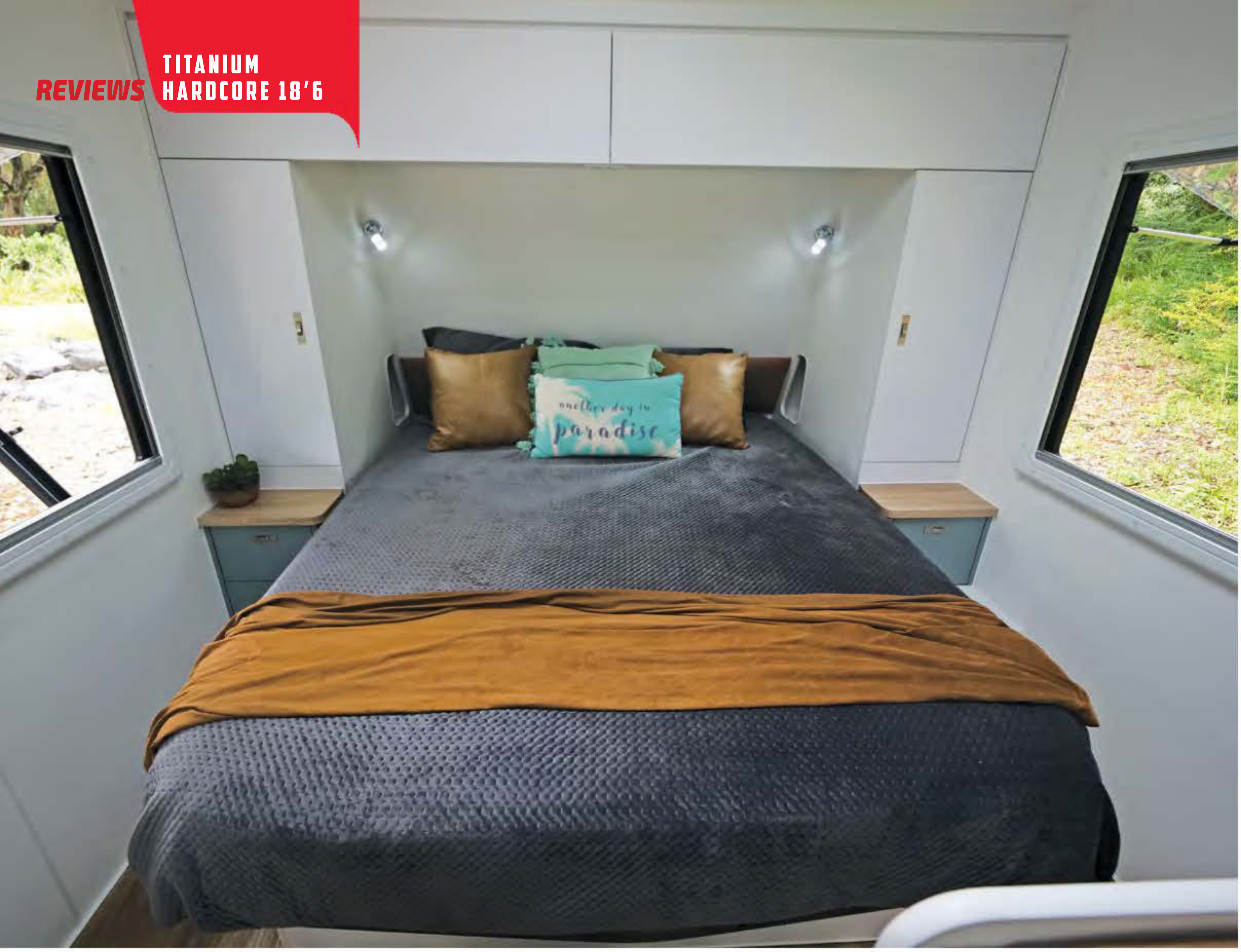
Our review van had Titanium's level One Enerdrive B-Tec lithium system with three 200W solar panels, feeding a 200Ah battery. The system includes Enerdrive 40A DC-DC and AC-DC chargers and a 40A solar regulator, and you keep track of the battery condition at a monitor in an overhead kitchen cupboard. So, along with 255L of freshwater and an 85L grey tank, you should be able to stay comfortably in the bush for a couple of weeks if you are moderate with showers.

TOWING IS SMOOTH

Weighing in with a tare weight of 2652kg and a loaded weight of up to 3500kg, the Titanium 18'6 Hardcore needs a capable tow vehicle, so we hooked up to the Caravans Coffs Coast's 200 Series LandCruiser for our run to the photo location. There's an 848kg payload, so you have nearly 600kg for the rest of your gear, even with full water and gas tanks.

The 200 had no problem pulling up the steep hills to the west of town, and the van sat rock steady all the way at posted speed limits. The van feels well-balanced, and the big 12in drums performed flawlessly.

> "The LandCruiser 200 had no problem pulling up the steep hills, *and the van sat rock steady all the way at posted speed limits*"



> "*There's room to move*, and it comes equipped for most circumstances"

THE BOTTOM LINE

The 18'6 Titanium is a mid-size offroader that, through its high build quality, will travel the rough tracks to out-of-the-way places. Couples will enjoy the extra space over a single-axle van because it's a good compromise of size and weight with a very useful payload. There's room to move, and it comes equipped for most circumstances. Registered on the road in NSW, the cost is $133,440, and the van comes with a five-year structural warranty on suspension, chassis, frame and floor and two years on the interior.

IN BRIEF: Beautifully engineered mid-size van with all the necessary components for rough road travel. Tows beautifully and with a sensible payload will suit most twin cabs as well as the larger 4WDs.

ABOVE AND BELOW The queen island bed is up front and away from the rear entry; This mid-size van is a good choice for couples who want room to move but also the ability to get offroad

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The iTECH100 Lithium Battery is the next-generation power solution for caravan owners in Australia, designed to offer exceptional performance and convenience. This innovative battery is developed by iTechworld, an Australian family-owned company dedicated to delivering the best technology solutions to its customers.

Unlike lead-acid batteries, which have dominated the market for years, the iTECH100 Lithium Battery offers a superior solution with a 100% usable capacity, allowing users to access the full 100Ah battery power. The iTECH100 is also incredibly lightweight, weighing only 13kg, up to 20kg lighter than its lead-acid counterpart, making it an ideal choice for those who are always on the go.

Moreover, the iTECH100 Lithium Battery is designed with a drop-in replacement technology, which makes it compatible with 99% of battery chargers on the market, including lead-acid and AGM chargers. This means that upgrading to iTechworld's lithium battery does not require any changes to your existing wiring or system, making it an effortless and convenient solution.

The iTECH100 Lithium Battery also features a specialised BMS, capable of a 250 amp peak draw, making it ideal for use with inverters. This battery is rated for over 4000 cycles, which is eight times longer than its AGM equivalent, making it an excellent investment for those who want a long-lasting and reliable power.

For those who require longer power off-grid, the iTECH100 Lithium Battery offers the flexibility to connect up to four iTECH100's together, creating the ultimate off-grid caravan system. The iTECH100 is maintenance-free, so you can enjoy peace of mind, knowing that your power supply is always in good condition.

In conclusion, the iTECH100 Lithium Battery is the perfect choice for caravan owners in Australia, offering exceptional performance, versatility, and ease of use. With its drop-in replacement technology, lightweight and maintenance-free design, the iTECH100 Lithium Battery is the perfect choice for those who want to take their adventures to the next level.

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"I have recently replaced a 120Ah AGM battery which weighed 32KG, with the iTECH100 Lithium Battery in my caravan. It was much easier fitting the lithium battery than removing the hefty AGM battery. I am very impressed with the performance of the iTECH100, having been delivered super fast - two days earlier than expected. I would highly recommend this product."

Peter M

"I bought 3 x iTECH100 Lithium Batteries to replace the 3 x 120Ah AGM. Simply brilliant and works perfectly."

Andrew D

For more information, *visit iTechworld.com.au or call 1300 483 249*

iTECHWORLD
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PRE-TAKEOFF CHECK

Getting ready for a big trip in a caravan does require some pre-trip preparation. There's the tow vehicle to consider and the caravan, which includes gear to carry.

Words Malcolm Street Pics Supplied

For anyone about to depart on a caravanning trip and who hasn't used their caravan for a while, many pre-trip checks probably need to be done before travel. That's particularly important for a van that has been in long-term storage and out of sight for months.

Before anything else, it's a good idea to give the caravan a thorough clean, inside and out. Not only will the van be sparkling fresh and ready for travel, but it's also a good way of inspecting the van closely and detecting any potential problems.

CLEANING UP

For cleaning the outside, it's best to never use a high-pressure water blaster. Damaging water seals and forcing water into places it shouldn't be is always a risk, as is removing older decals. Using a standard garden hose and a bucket of water might be slower, but it also allows for a careful inspection at the same time.

The choice of detergent is a matter of horses for courses but using the same as used for a tow vehicle is a reasonable approach. Something that doesn't cause long-term damage to any painted panels, moulded trims, seals and rubber. The awning and the vinyl gusset in a pop-top is best done with nothing more potent than soap and water or a dedicated cleaner. Washing is best done by starting from the top down, and a challenge for many is washing the roof and items such as solar panels. A good ladder with non-slip steps is best, but roof cleaning should be done carefully. Although not in a factory, sensible OH&S matters still apply. Washing the roof is an opportunity to inspect hatches and air conditioners and the sealing around them. Acrylic windows are commonly used on caravans and are best cleaned with a soft brush or a non-abrasive cloth to avoid scratching.

For minimising streaks, it's best to avoid washing in direct sunlight, but at the same time a warm day is best to ensure everything is thoroughly dried out before the van is closed up. A wipe-over with a chamois or microfibre cloth is an excellent way to avoid the streaks and scratching.

> "Pre-trip checks need to be done before travel, *particularly for a van that has been in long-term storage"*

A wash and inspection of the van should also include the chassis area. You don't have to be too much of an expert to ensure that all the cabling and pipework is strapped up out of the way and that the suspension, handbrake cable and water tanks are all where they should be. A van parked up for some time can often become a haven for unwanted squatters of the insect/rodent variety and offloading those is best done before leaving.

Inside the van, use something like a cordless vacuum cleaner with a long handle for getting into awkward places but a brush and dustpan work equally well. Household surface cleaners are okay to use on all benchtop and shelf surfaces. The cupboard and overhead locker interiors can always do with a close look. Water leaks are only sometimes in obvious places; if there is a problem, it's always good to get in early before serious damage occurs.

ABOVE AND BELOW A soft chamois or microfibre cloth will avoid scratches; On the roof, check the seals around air conditioning units and the like

FLUKE 322
CLAMP METER
HOLD
OFF
25.0

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Check the batteries with a multimeter; Outdoor storage is the best place for leads, hoses, camp chairs and other outdoor necessities; Check tyres carefully for cracks and other damage

PROFESSIONAL WORK

Having done the big clean, next your van should be fully serviced. If being done professionally to ensure everything is in top order, then before a service, do functional checks on everything that opens, closes, heats or cools. That includes the entry door, windows, awning, corner stabilisers, handbrake, cooker, fridge (by all energy sources), microwave oven, air-conditioner, water heater and space heater (if fitted).

There are other items, too, such as the sacrificial anode fitted to the water heater. It's easily checked and replaced if necessary. It depends a bit on usage, but an annual check is a good idea. All caravans these days have fire alarms. Like a domestic house unit, changing the 9V battery once a year is a good idea.

Any problems not easily fixed can be done when the van has a service. That service should include checking the coupling, handbrake, wheel bearings, suspension, shock absorbers, electric brakes and running lights. All those items are very much safety-related and apart from road use, a problem for vans that have been standing still for an extended period is that something might have dried out lubrication or, worse, seized up.

A handbrake that isn't adjusted correctly is not good on the sloping ground found in many a caravan park or anywhere else for that matter. Electric brakes fitted to most caravans are subject to wear and tear, both the brake shoes and the brake magnet. Worn or cracked brake shoes should certainly be replaced. Similarly, the brake magnets. Manufactured indents or grooves that are worn down indicate excessive wear on the magnet's surface. Another issue is that the insulation on the magnet wires can sometimes be damaged.

Tapered roller bearings are usually fitted to caravan wheels. Those in good condition spin easily but pitting or scoring of the rollers, blue haze on the bearing surfaces and resistance to movement all indicate a problem.

Leaf spring suspension doesn't require much maintenance apart from a bit of greasing, but independent suspension does – wheel alignment, bushes and shock absorbers all need to be checked.

WHEN THE RUBBER HITS THE ROAD

Tyres on anything rolling are indeed a vital component. Ensuring good tread depth and correct tyre pressures is essential for road safety. Tyres also age and have a life (all tyres have the date of manufacture on them). It is often a problem on RVs because the tread still looks good, but the tyre is past its use-by date. A clue is often tiny cracks in the walls.

BATTERY CHECK

Particularly on vans kept in storage without any charging facilities, battery charge capacity can be a problem. Charging from all sources – mains charger, solar panels and DC-DC should certainly be tested before travel, as should discharge rates. Is the battery still capable of operating all the necessary devices – fridge, lighting and water pump? Generally speaking, if a caravan is placed in long-term storage, it's best to remove the batteries altogether if there is no charging capability.

LOADING MATTERS

For those travelling for the first time, loading a van isn't just stashing everything in the van before heading off. Heavy items should be kept low and preferably above the axles. A technique learned from experience, more so than theory, is to try and store items for users' convenience so that frequently used items are close to hand. Items such as plates, cups and glasses need to be packed so that movement is minimal when travelling. Non-slip matting cut to size is ideal for all cupboards and bubble wrap strategically placed minimises movement. Items such as hoses, power leads and camp chairs should ideally be kept in an external bin, primarily for convenience but it's handy to keep anything wet outside.

A consideration before heading off for long-term RV owners might be a stocktake of everything on board. I suspect many of us acquire items along the way but never shed anything. There's a much greater interest from the road authorities these days in overweight RVs, and an evaluation of everything on board and its usage or lack thereof would be a good exercise in load shedding. Anything from tools never used to unseasonal clothing to books and magazines that have long been read. It's surprising just how much paper weighs – try picking up a year's worth of *Caravan World* magazines! For those who like books and CDs, perhaps it's time to consider something like a Kindle reader or get the Spotify app on your phone or tablet.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Good towing mirrors are essential; Give everything a good clean and do a stocktake of everything on board; Small cordless vacuum cleaners can get into tight spots

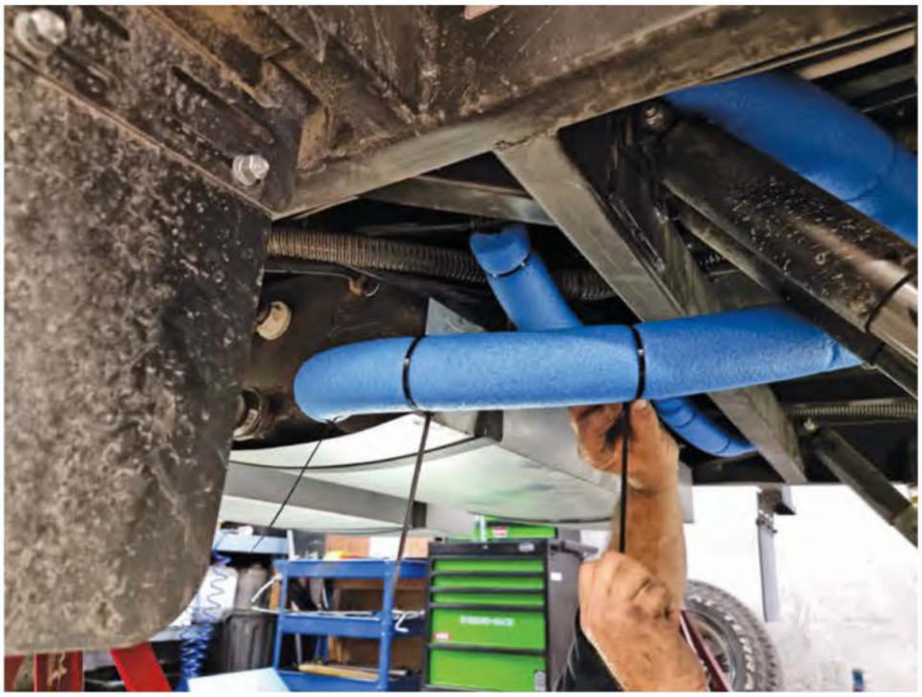
"A consideration before heading off for long-term RV owners *might be a stocktake of everything on board*"

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Include WD-40 in your toolkit; Don't forget to check the chassis; Cable ties have many uses

THE TOOLBOX

Tools carried are a matter of personal choice to some extent. However, whatever your handyperson skills, some essential items like a multibit screwdriver, pliers, multi-grips and maybe a shifting spanner are always useful. An axe and small bush saw are handy for those who like open fires.

Let's not forget the invaluable items such as WD-40, cable ties and duct tape. In addition, any special tools specific to the van should be carried. Another couple of useful items are a Leatherman tool (there are several varieties) or equivalent and a Stanley knife. For night-time, a decent torch is always handy. No need for the old Dolphin-style torch; quality LED pocket-sized torches are very good these days.



TOW VEHICLE PREPARATION

Anyone who owns a tow vehicle or motorhome will be familiar with many of the items that need to be addressed before any lengthy trip gets underway. The first is to ensure the mechanicals, that is the engine, gearbox, cooling system and brakes, are fully serviced and in tip-top condition. That includes the tow hitch, safety chain attachment, electrical connections and towing mirrors. The latter item is something many people need to remember. Sadly, that number includes many tow vehicle advertisers. The states and territories require the driver to have a clear line of sight behind the caravan at all times. That either means having an extended external mirror or a fitted towing mirror. Besides the legal reasons, towing mirrors are simply an additional safety factor.

JUST BEFORE DEPARTURE

Anyone new to the business of caravan touring or even those with fine weight margins should get their rig weighed when fully loaded. That includes gas cylinders and water tanks. Before going anywhere, head off to the nearest weighbridge or use mobile weighing services that are becoming more prolific. In some ways, the latter is preferred because wheel weights, axle weights, tow ball mass, gross vehicle mass (GVM), gross combined mass (GCM) and payloads can all be accurately determined.

FINALLY

A good reason for pre-departure checks is that Australia is a big country and it's easy to be a long way from a necessary service centre, either for a caravan or a tow vehicle. Taking a little time to fix any problems before leaving may avoid the need to be parked by the roadside waiting for assistance instead of enjoying the beautiful countryside.

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STOW IT AWAY

Word Amelia Mansell **Pics** Supplied

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LEFT Pack your van with care and consideration (Image Allison Watt)

Finding a van with the right amount of interior and exterior storage can feel like a modern-day retelling of Goldilocks – some have too little, others too much, and some are just right. But once you've found the perfect van to storage ratio, packing it safely and effectively is another matter entirely.

Learning how to use your storage space can be a double-edged sword – because the more space you save with effective packing, the more tempted you can be to overpack.

So, before you begin loading all your gear on board, let's get our heads around the all-important issue of weight distribution and how to pack your van. Understanding your towing capacity plays a large role in weight distribution, and more information can be found on RVSafe's website (www.rvsafe.com.au/understanding-tow-vehicle-capacities) or in our towing weight feature in the January issue (631).

WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION

Once you have your head around the legal weight your tow vehicle and van can carry, the logic around packing your van to maintain a safe weight distribution is fairly simple. Weight distribution refers to how the total mass of the van is distributed across its axles and tyres. If done correctly, the weight should be distributed evenly from left to right and front to back. Packing incorrectly can have a range of issues depending on where the load is unevenly placed.

If more weight is placed towards the front of your van, more pressure you put on your tow vehicle's ball weight and suspension, and it can start to lift the tow vehicle's front wheels. Alternatively, too much weight at the rear of your van can have the opposite see-saw effect and lift the rear of your tow vehicle, causing low traction, braking issues and difficulty managing movement. Too much weight on either side of your van will affect your handing experience.

One of the most common effects of incorrect weight distribution is swaying or snaking, when the uneven weight in the van causes the van to swing from side to side with the hitch acting as the pivot point. This can be very dangerous to both you and others on the road. Many caravans have sway control, but it is always best to pack correctly and avoid it to begin with than be complacent and risk the system failing.

It's for this reason that it's best to keep your heavy items in a central location so that the weight is carried on the axles or spread throughout the van to create balance. Storing the heavy items as low down as possible will also aid in keeping the van stable and avoids the chance of items falling and causing damage to the van or injury.

And as mentioned, it is important to ensure you do not overload your van, as this can have legal and safety consequences.

> “Packing cubes are ideal for keeping your clothes storage under control – *both in terms of organisation and quantity*”

ABOVE Oztent has its own range of packing pods with clear PVC lids for easy identification

STORAGE SOLUTIONS

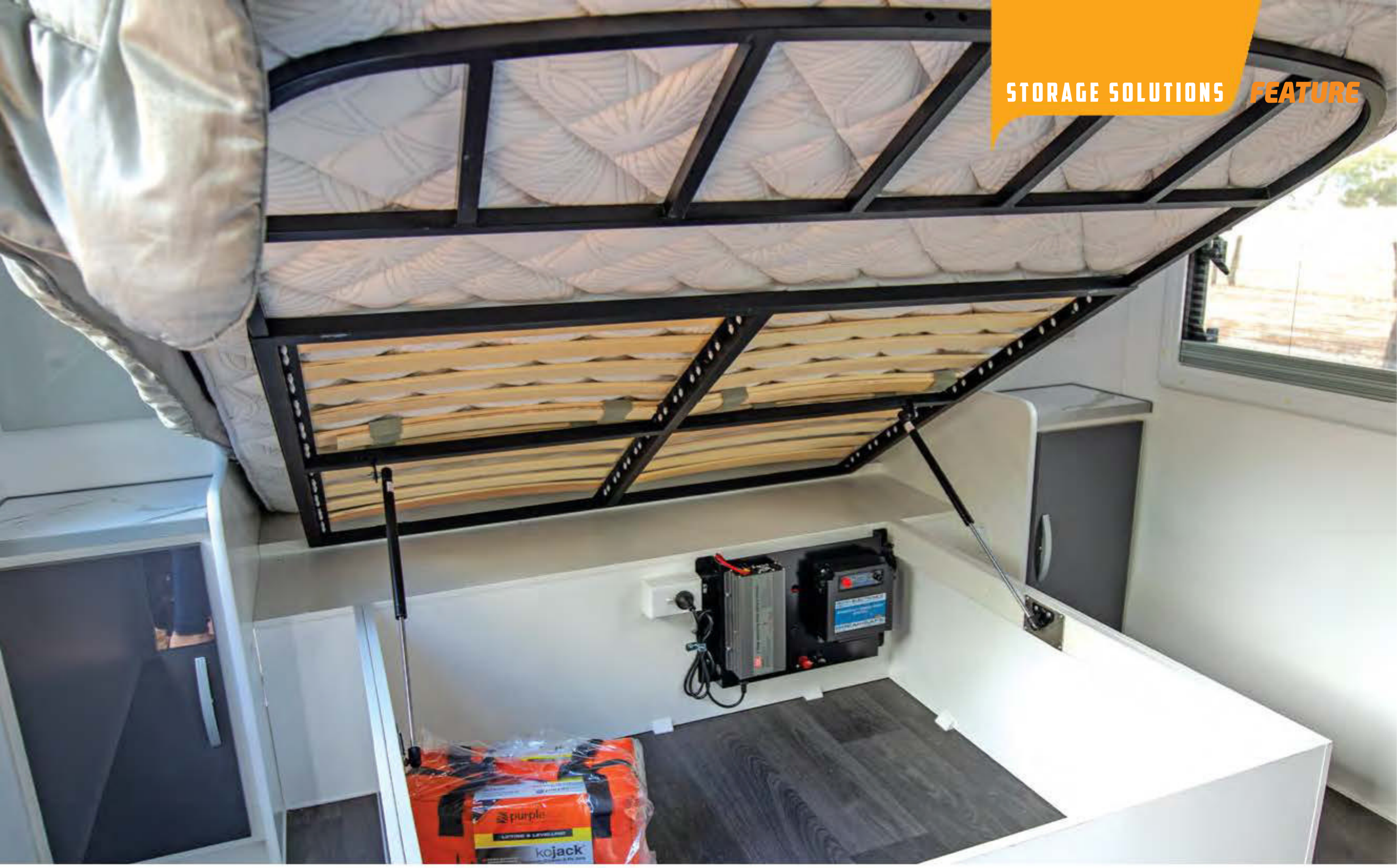
Now that you’ve got your van weight and distribution under control, organising your storage is the next matter to consider.

When packing, consider if items are absolutely necessary or luxuries that won’t ever be used.

Packing cubes are ideal for keeping your clothes storage under control – both in terms of organisation and quantity. With these you can sort your clothes into categories for easy access, whether it’s keeping your shirts and shorts separated or having an identifiable cube for each child. Most chain stores such as Ikea, Kmart and Target sell variants of these in different sizes, colours and formats – lids versus open, with dividers or without. And many of these options are made from materials with enough flex to squeeze into different sized compartments. For a more long-term option, Oztent has its own range of storage pods with clear PVC lids for easy identification, handles, and labels.

Collapsible items are great space-saving solutions, whether it’s your favourite collapsible travel keep-cup that can pack easily away when not in use, or collapsible silicon food containers.

Overhead cabinets in the van are the domain of all things lightweight. Think your lighter food stuffs, such as chips, biscuits, pasta, bread, as well as eating and drinking utensils. Ikea, Kmart, Target and Aldi are all great options for finding plastic or melamine cups, plates and dishes that won’t take up too much space – or better yet, too much weight. And remember to keep an eye out for options that stack securely. If you prefer to eat off traditional crockery, make sure you only bring what you need. While it might be nice to have a set of six at home, it’s unnecessary weight and baggage when travelling. The Corelle brand is a popular option for lightweight and durable dinnerware, and can be bought directly from the brand’s website or at Big W.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Under the bed storage is great for bulky items; Collapsible water containers are a space saver (Image Emma Warren); Non-slip matting in cupboards will prevent items moving around in transit (Image Allison Watt); KMart containers store heavy bottles in narrow floor-level cupboards (Image Allison Watt)

If you're not a fan of drinking hot drinks from plastic and want your favourite mug to join you on the road, non-slip mats are your friend. Use these to line the shelf and store the cups upside down so that they don't move around when travelling. Or another trick is storing your glassware in stubby holders to stop them from hitting each other and breaking while you're on the road.

To make even better use of your cupboard space, consider adding a freestanding shelf to maximise the height of the cupboard or plastic basket to keep the items contained when travelling. There are plenty of options out there in all shapes and sizes to suit your van's storage. And remember to consider practical elements like clear sides for visibility and handles for easy access. Label stickers also go a long way at ensuring you and whoever you're travelling with can find things at a glance rather than disrupting all your careful packing.

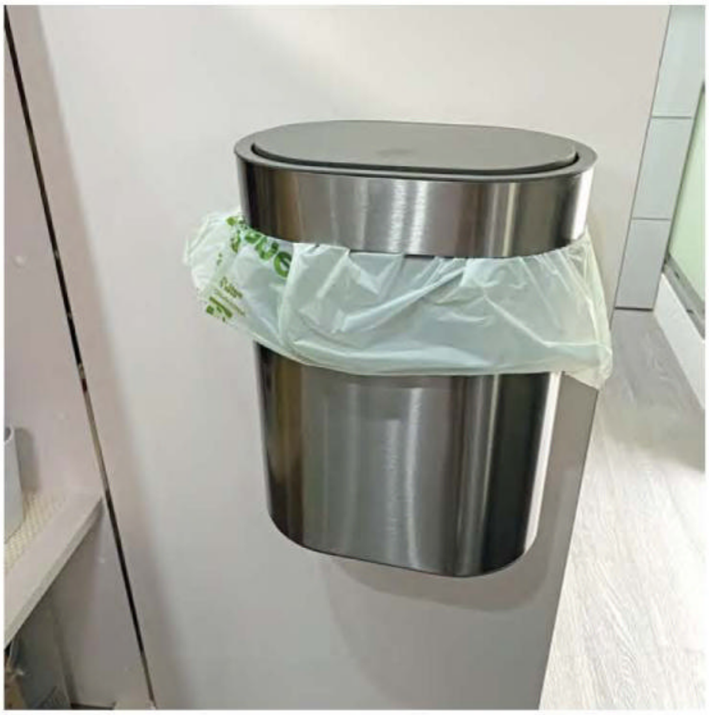
BULKY ITEMS

As mentioned, all your bigger and heavier items should be kept low – not only to avoid them falling and hurting someone (you or the van) but also to keep the van's centre of gravity low.

Store your jars, cans, potatoes and other heavy things such as pots and pans in the lower cabinets. Once more, stores like Kmart and Ikea can prove very helpful in finding simple plastic organisers.

The amount of underbed storage you have to play with can be hit and miss depending on your van, as many can be taken up with the built-in batteries and other accessories. However, be mindful of how much weight you store under the bed, because it can affect weigh balance. And due to the versatility of the underbed storage, it's always good to check what's packed away before you head out on your next holiday to make sure you aren't carrying all your beach gear during the winter months.

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Cleaning products in the ensuite cupboard (Image Allison Watt); A small bin mounted inside a cupboard door is nicely tucked away out of sight (Image Allison Watt); Maximise overhead cupboard space with a shelf, non-slip matting and a plastic basket to keep things tidy (Image Allison Watt); Containers for small items keep fridges tidy



> "For space, aesthetic and travel reasons, *having the rubbish bin sitting on the floor of the caravan isn't ideal*"

STORAGE HACKS

Hanging shoe racks are a surprisingly versatile storage hack. Not just fulfilling their original purpose – keeping your shoes all in one spot and easily accessed – these hanging racks can also hold other supplies, such as cleaning products or toiletries and hang inside a cupboard. Other caravanners swear by suction hooks and shelves to store all the necessary odds and ends, particularly in the bathroom where you don't want to have to allocate shelf space to your soap, shampoo or toothbrushes.

And don't be afraid to think outside the box and create storage yourself. Hanging macrame fruit holders and hat holders are making a comeback and have the added bonus of utilising otherwise dead space. Get these online from Amazon or even Etsy if you want to support local creators, or even find a tutorial if you want to take up the craft!

ODDS AND ENDS

Not to be forgotten are the necessary odds and ends that don't always have a designated place to store within the caravan layout.

One such is the rubbish bin. For space, aesthetic and travel reasons, having the rubbish bin sitting on the floor of the caravan isn't ideal for many travellers. Similarly, having it sit inside a cupboard shelf is not always practical or secure. Caravanners will have plenty of tips and tricks to share, including small wall-mountable bins that can be attached to the inside of cupboard doors, which can be found at most stores such as Ikea, Howards Storage World and Big W. This bin hack can work perfectly in the cupboard below the sink to utilise what can often be

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an awkward space. You could also look into converting a kitchen cupboard to allow for a bin slide, such as one provided by Bunnings' Kaboodle kitchen range.

Washing liquid and powder can add a surprising amount of weight to your packing, particularly if you're heading away for a longer period. Laundry detergent sheets are a great alternative to towing these heavy bottles or boxes around, and available in a variety of sized packs meaning you can gauge how many you might need for the length of time you might be away.

When it comes to external storage, plastic tubs with handles can be a lifesaver for keeping leads, cables, hoses and so on organised and easily accessible in the tunnel boot or storage bins. Collapsible buckets and laundry baskets are also great space savers and can be used to store other items when not in use.

ABOVE AND BELOW Baskets keep plastic drinkware in one place; Plastic tubs with handles keep hoses, leads and other bits tidy in the tunnel boot (Images Allison Watt)

> "*Plastic tubs with handles can be a lifesaver* for keeping leads, cables, hoses and so on organised and easily accessible in the tunnel boot or storage bins"

Kitchen appliances such an air fryer, Thermomix and coffee machine can either be a luxury or a necessity you can't live without. If you're not sure what side of the fence you're on, try allocating them space on a trip and take note of how often you use them – if it's only once, it might be worth saving the weight next time.

FINAL CHECKLIST

There are many things to consider when it comes to your caravan storage and how you utilise it. Weight plays an all-important role, from how much you can legally carry to where it is stored within the van. And because of this, it is always good to start at the beginning and take stock of just what needs to be on board for each trip and store it appropriately given its size, weight and how often you plan to use it.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Collapsible buckets have a myriad of uses; Some vans have a built-in pantries for condiments and other narrow items (Image Allison Watt); Keeping things tidy and secure while travelling (Image Allison Watt)

WINTON HARDWARE
Winton Neighbourhood Centre
WINTON OUTBACK
WINTON PHARMACY

THE HEART OF QUEENSLAND

Discover the fascinating town that gave us our unofficial national anthem, Waltzing Matilda, *our national airline, Qantas, and is the undisputed 'Dinosaur Capital of Australia'.*

Words and Pics **CHRIS WHITELAW**

OPALS
OPALS

> ***"This fascinating outback town, with a modest population of around 1600, makes no less than three claims to fame in Australian culture"***

Winton stands at the junction of two major highways that run through the heart of Central West Queensland – the Landsborough Highway from Longreach to Cloncurry and the Kennedy Developmental Road from Boulia to Hughenden. Brisbane is a distant 1360km away to the south-east. It is the administrative centre and service hub of a shire that sprawls 54,000sq km over seemingly endless Mitchell grass plains devoted to sheep and cattle grazing.

This fascinating outback town, with a modest population of around 1600, makes no less than three claims to fame in Australian culture – our unofficial national anthem, *Waltzing Matilda*, was written by Banjo Paterson and first performed here; it was the birthplace of our national airline, Qantas; and it is the undisputed 'Dinosaur Capital of Australia'.

Koa Country

Winton lies near the centre of the traditional lands of the Koa Aboriginal people, which embraces the headwaters of the Diamantina River and the area now designated as the Bladensburg National Park. These low-lying semi-arid plains are drained to the south-west by seasonal watercourses and braided streams typical of the Channel Country. Summers are swelteringly hot, and winters are pleasantly mild. Rainfall is highly variable, swinging periodically between searing drought and widespread floods.

When Europeans began to settle in the region and occupy the plains for grazing cattle, the Koa people were dispossessed of their tribal lands and forcibly dispersed. A particularly dark chapter in colonial history concerns a 'dispersal' that took place in 1877 on Bladensburg Station, 15km from Winton. In reprisal for an Aboriginal attack on a bullock wagon during which a white man was killed, a contingent of Native Police troopers and local graziers attacked and killed 200 Koa people camped on the banks of Mistake Creek. The incident is now referred to as the Bladensburg Massacre and the location as Skull Hole.

In 2021, the Federal Court of Australia recognised the Koa people as native title holders of land covering 31,400sq km, which includes the towns of Winton, Kynuna, Corfield and Middleton.

European Arrival

The first Europeans to explore the Winton region were William Landsborough, John McKinlay and Frederick Walker who, in 1861–62, led separate expeditions in search of the missing Burke and Wills. They had seen it in a good season and their reports of verdant grasslands suitable for grazing attracted pastoralists who began to settle in the district from around the mid-1860s.

In a recurring cycle that would prove typical of the plains' environment, a severe drought in the late 1860s forced some settlers to abandon their holdings, but a new wave of settlement came when the drought broke and rising wool prices rekindled interest in pastoralism. By the mid-1870s, pastoral leases occupied most of the district.

From Waterhole to Winton

In 1875, a former police sergeant from Aramac, Robert Allen, arrived in the area and opened a store and hotel at Pelican Waterhole, a crossing point on the Western River. When the waterhole flooded in the following year, Allen moved his business to higher ground about a mile away and named the site Winton after his hometown in Bournemouth (England).

Winton's role as the region's business hub was assured in the late-1870s when entrepreneurs William Corfield, Robert Fitzmaurice and Thomas Lynett established stores and several hotels along the main street. The town was formally gazetted in 1879 and became the administrative centre of the local government division when it was proclaimed seven years later.

Industrial Unrest

By 1890, Queensland, and the Winton district in particular, were major contributors to Australia's wool industry, despite consistently poor working conditions for shearers. With the growth of the industry, the number of shearers increased and many joined unions to campaign for better conditions. They 'unionised' thousands of sheds across the country, which soon brought them into conflict with pastoralists who advocated freedom of contract with non-union labour to control wages and break the unions' control.

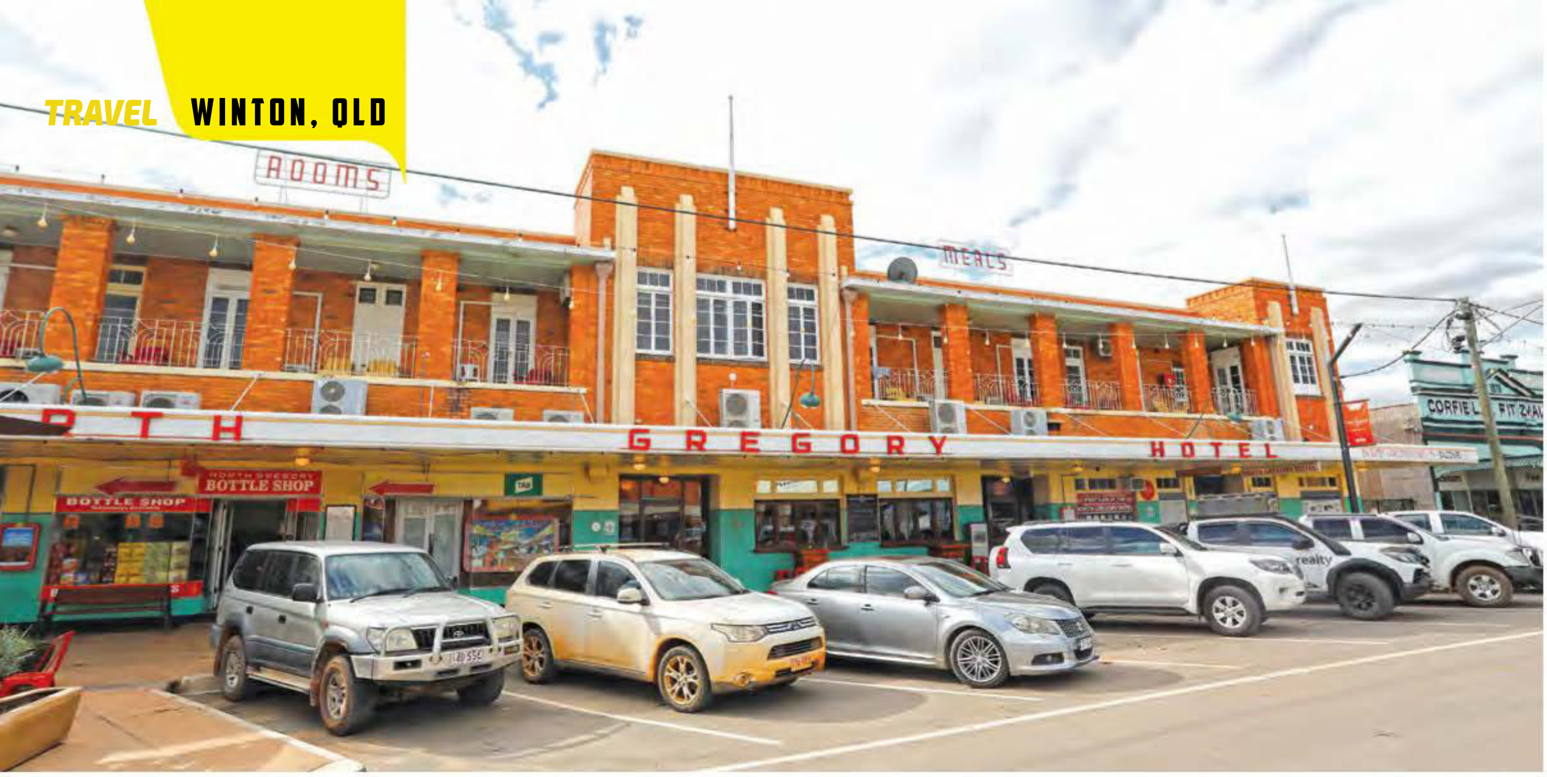
In January 1891, the Queensland unions declared a boycott of non-union sheds, and striking shearers walked off many stations around Winton and other centres. From February until May, central Queensland was on the brink of civil war. Striking shearers formed armed camps outside towns, with the Winton camp vowing to "fight to the bitter end". Thousands of soldiers were mobilised to protect non-union labour and arrest strike leaders. The unionists retaliated by raiding shearing sheds, harassing non-union labour and committing acts of sabotage, like burning down the woolshed on Elderslie Station.

But the shearers were unable to hold out and, by May, the union camps were full of hungry, penniless shearers who were forced to return to work in order to survive. The pastoralists had won but it had proved a costly exercise and, as it turned out, a short-lived victory. Tensions continued to simmer. Falling wool prices moved pastoralists to cut pay rates and hire non-union labour, which was plentiful due to mass unemployment during a nationwide depression. Increasingly militant and desperate unions rose to the defence of shearers' wages and, in 1894, Winton once again found itself at the centre of another violent struggle when a second shearers' strike was called.

During the 'Battle of Dagworth Station' in September 1894, armed shearers, led by Samuel 'Frenchy' Hoffmeister, stormed the property and burned down the woolshed. The station's owner, Robert Macpherson, and three policemen pursued Hoffmeister to nearby Combo Waterhole, where he killed himself rather than be captured. By October 1894, the Queensland unions conceded defeat and called off the strike in that state, although the struggle would continue unabated in New South Wales for some time to come.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Opals were a major mining industry south of Winton; Sunset on the town's main street; This exhibit pays tribute to Winton's pastoral heritage

GOLDEN FLEECE
"the prosperity of Australia is absolutely based on a beast – the Merino sheep"
MERINO
KAROOLA
WINTON QLD
FCH



Waltzing Matilda

In January 1895, Banjo Paterson visited his friend, Bob Macpherson, at Dagworth Station, 100km northwest of Winton. One evening, Bob's sister, Christina, entertained the guests by playing the Scottish tune *Craigielea*. Paterson quite liked the melody and, when he was told it had no words, set about writing lyrics for it. Thus, *Waltzing Matilda* was written and given its first public performance at Winton's North Gregory Hotel on 6 April 1895.

Many theories have been advanced as to the inspiration for the words. One suggests that they are based on a story told locally about the misadventures of an unknown swagman. Another, favoured by historians, is that the poem is a political allegory based on the Hoffmeister incident at Combo Waterhole. Whatever may be the true explanation, the song has been embraced by Australians everywhere and sung with gusto as our unofficial national anthem.

On 6 April 1995, Winton marked the centenary of *Waltzing Matilda* with a festival, attended by Prime Minister Paul Keating and Queensland Premier Wayne Goss who unveiled a statue of Banjo Paterson. (Matilda Day has since become an annual event in the town.) Completed at a cost of $3.1 million, the Waltzing Matilda Centre was opened in 1998, combining Winton's existing Qantilda Museum with an impressive range of new displays constructed around Paterson's story of the swagman. It was the world's first museum dedicated to a song. Disaster struck in June 2015 when the centre burned down, destroying many artefacts. It was rebuilt and reopened in April 2018 and continues as one of the town's principal attractions.

The Flying Kangaroo

Winton's remoteness in central Queensland was gradually overcome by the commencement of regular stagecoach services by Cobb & Co in 1880, and the arrival of the railway from Townsville via Hughenden (1887) and from Rockhampton through Longreach (1892). But the whole concept of transport was revolutionised on 16 November 1920, when a group of World War I veterans – Paul McGinness, Hudson Fysh and Fergus McMaster – met at the Winton Club to found Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Limited (Qantas).

Inspired by the 'spirit of ANZAC', these young aviators shared a vision of connecting outback communities with major population centres in Australia and overseas. The company headquarters was moved to Longreach in 1921 and, from joyriding and charter work, quickly developed a route network that included its first international passenger service (to Singapore) in 1935. Since then, 'The Flying Kangaroo' has become Australia's national carrier and the third-oldest airline in the world.

> ***"Thus, Waltzing Matilda was written and given its first public performance at Winton's North Gregory Hotel on 6 April 1895"***

ABOVE AND BELOW The charming art deco-style North Gregory Hotel; Relics of a bygone era at the Qantilda Museum

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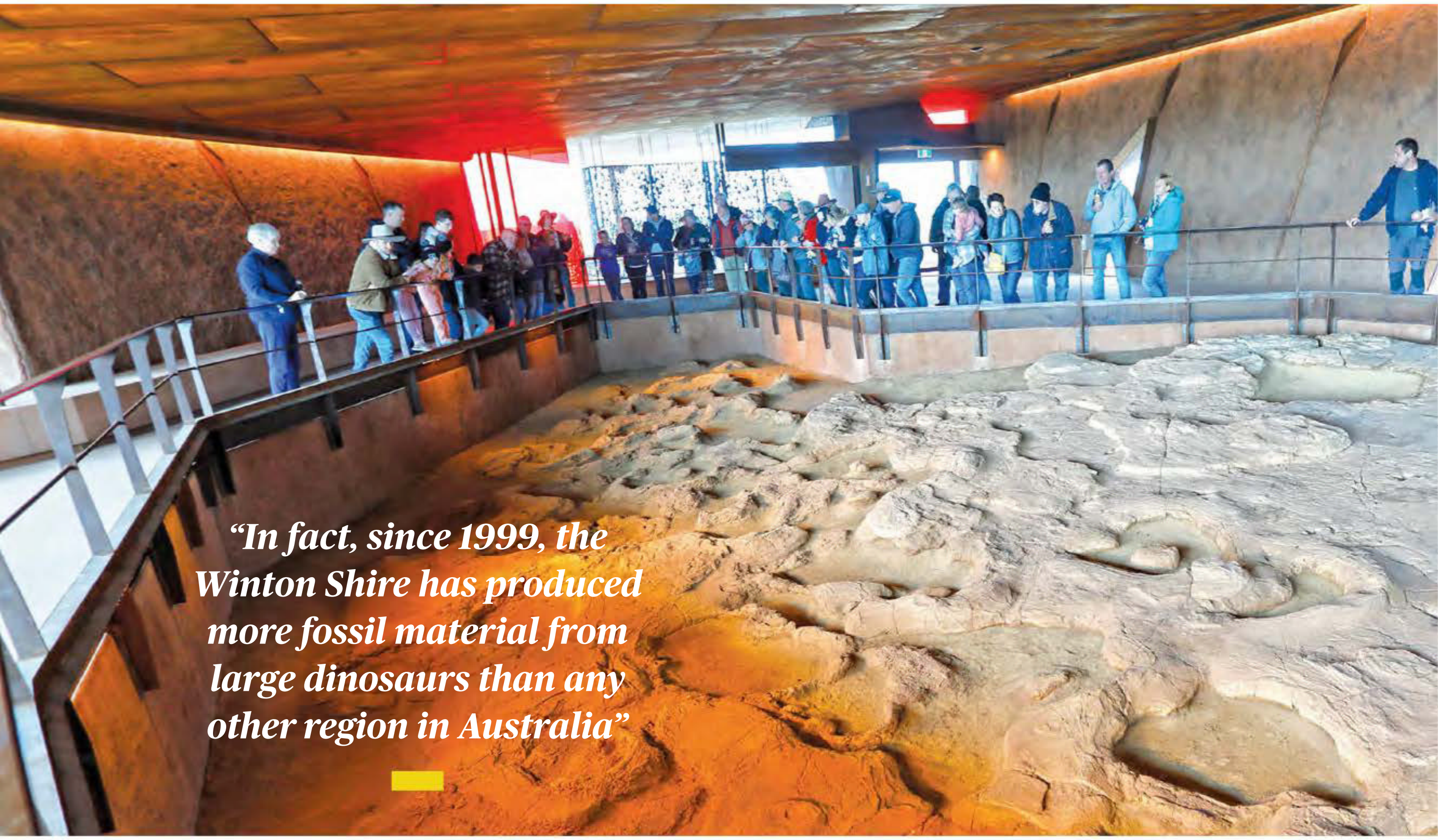
WALTZING MATILDA CENTRE
Tuckerbox Cafe

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The streetscape of the Waltzing Matilda Centre; Life-sized sauropod replicas at the AAOD; Inside the March of the Titanosaurs pavilion at the AAOD

Dinosaur Capital of Australia

While Winton's economy remains heavily dependent on pastoral prosperity, it has built up a strong tourist trade as the 'Dinosaur Capital of Australia' based on several major fossil discoveries in the surrounding plains. In fact, since 1999, the Winton Shire has produced more fossil material from large dinosaurs than any other region in Australia, with several new sites being discovered each year yielding more extraordinary specimens.

Most of these have been 100-million-year-old sauropods, called 'titanosaurs' because they were the largest land animals that ever walked the Earth. Scientists have bestowed the most notable and complete of the local behemoth specimens with whimsical names like Elliot, Wade, Matilda and Clancy, all measuring around 15–18m long, 3.5m at the shoulder and weighing an estimated 20 tonnes. The odd couple are Banjo, a predatory carnivore of the theropod family distantly related to, though many times bigger than, the Velociraptors popularised by the *Jurassic Park* movie; and Butch, a pterosaur (winged reptile) with a wingspan of 4m that enabled it to soar across prehistoric oceans between primordial continents.



"In fact, since 1999, the Winton Shire has produced more fossil material from large dinosaurs than any other region in Australia"

Winton occupies one corner of a themed touring route around central Queensland, known as the Australian Dinosaur Trail (ADT). This roughly triangular circuit connects Hughenden, with a superb skeleton of Muttaburrasaurus at the Flinders Discovery Centre; Richmond's display of marine fossils at Kronosaurus Korner; and Winton, with the nearby Australian Age of Dinosaurs (AAOD) and the Lark Quarry Conservation Park 110km to the south.

The ADT website (www.australiasdinosaurtrail.com.au) describes the unique features of these locations and, while they are all well worth a visit, the outstanding AAOD is unquestionably the region's premier attraction.

The Australian Age of Dinosaurs

Following the discovery of fossils on Belmont Station in 1999, the not-for-profit organisation 'Australian Age of Dinosaurs' was formed to continue dinosaur digs and conserve the unearthed fossil treasures. Since then, with the assistance of the Queensland Museum and government funding, the AAOD has developed the Museum of Natural History, which is home to the world's largest collection of Australian dinosaur fossils and the most productive fossil preparation laboratory in the Southern Hemisphere.

The museum occupies a spectacular 1800ha site commanding panoramic views from the top of an ancient mesa plateau, 25km south-east of Winton on the Landsborough Highway. Attracting nearly 60,000 visitors annually, the museum has three facilities, with tours of each illuminating unique aspects of a 'total dinosaur experience'.

The award-winning Reception Centre contains the climate-controlled Collection Room housing fossil specimens of some of the region's signature sauropods. The guided tour of the room is complemented by an animated audio-visual presentation of western Queensland's dinosaurs and excerpts from the Museum's movie documentary, *Monsters in the Outback*.

The Fossil Preparation Laboratory provides a behind-the-scenes view of the pain-staking work carried out by paleontologists and technicians to recover fossils from their stony deposits and prepare them for scientific study and public exhibition.

The Dinosaur Canyon Outpost incorporates a 300m elevated concrete pathway which explores five galleries featuring life-size dinosaurs cast in bronze to recreate life as it would have been around prehistoric Winton. An adjacent architect-designed pavilion houses the 'March of the Titanosaurs', a 54m track site of dinosaur footprints recovered and relocated from a creek channel on a property near Winton.

> ***"Even when they've seen all these sights (and there are many more), several annual events and festivals are guaranteed to draw visitors back to Winton"***

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OPEN AIR PICTURE SHOW
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LEFT The historic open-air Royal Theatre (1918)

FAST FACTS

North Gregory Hotel
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E: info@northgregoryhotel.com
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Australian Age of Dinosaurs
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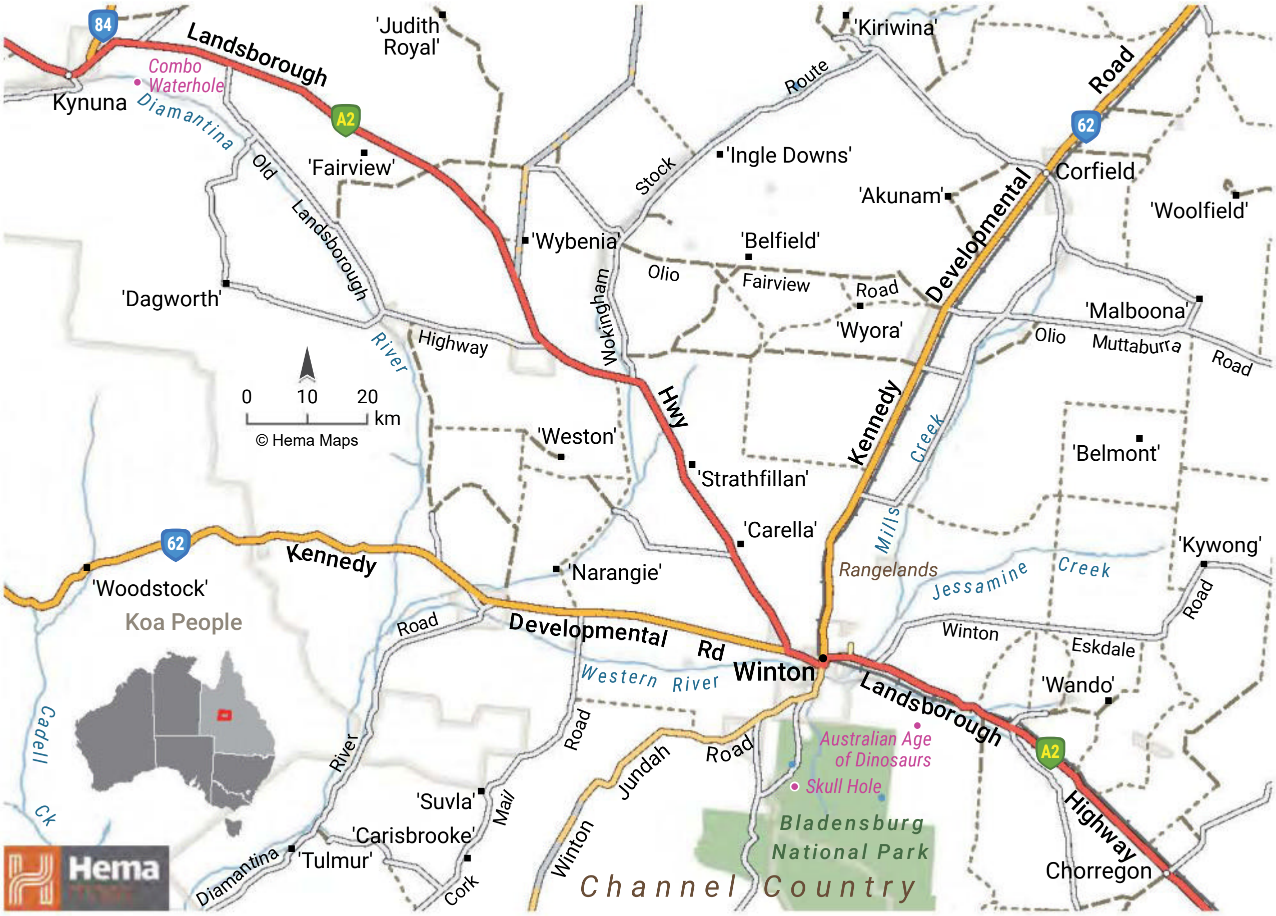
W: australianageofdinosaurs.com

Waltzing Matilda Centre
P: (07) 4657 1466
E: waltzing@matildacentre.com.au
W: matildacentre.com.au

Heritage Truck & Machinery Museum
P: 0429 806 140
E: heritagetruckswinton@hotmail.com.au
W: wintontruckmuseum.com.au


84
Landsborough
'Judith Royal'
'Kiriwina'
Combo Waterhole
Kynuna
Diamantina
A2
Route
Road
62
Old
Landsborough
'Fairview'
Stock
'Ingle Downs'
Corfield
'Akunam'
'Woolfield'
Developmental
'Wybenia'
'Belfield'
Olio
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'Dagworth'
River
Highway
Wokingham
'Wyora'
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Kennedy
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'Weston'
'Strathfillan'
'Belmont'
'Carella'
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62
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'Woodstock'
'Narangie'
Rangelands
Jessamine
Creek
Road
Koa People
Road
Developmental
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Winton
Eskdale
Western
River
Winton
Landsborough
'Wando'
Cadell
Ck
River
Road
Jundah
Road
Australian Age of Dinosaurs
Skull Hole
A2
'Suvla'
Mail
Bladensburg National Park
Highway
'Carisbrooke'
Hema
Diamantina
'Tulmur'
Cork
Winton
Channel Country
Chorregon

ABOVE Recreating Jurassic life in the Dinosaur Canyon

Events and Other Attractions

There is much else to keep a visitor busy for a couple of days exploring this genuinely fascinating town and engaging with its friendly community in celebrating annual events.

A walk down the main street (Elderslie) with an interpretive town map (available at the Waltzing Matilda Centre) will reveal many reminders of the town's unique outback heritage. A broad green nature strip running two blocks through the business centre has been landscaped with sculptures and displays on pastoral and historic themes, such as the 'Jolly Swagman' sculpture and the 'Pelican Waterhole' installation opposite Tattersalls Hotel.

Museum-minded folk will enjoy the heritage-listed Corfield and Fitzmaurice Store (built in 1916 to replace the original one) as one of the most perfectly preserved old-style general stores in Australia, currently used for displays of local crafts, gemstones and minerals; and the Diamantina Heritage Truck and Machinery Museum on Manuka Street with an impressive array of classic trucks that showcase the region's road transport heritage.

The current North Gregory Hotel, the fourth of its lineage (the first three burned down), was built in 1955 in a charming art deco style in the same location as the original pub and houses a fascinating collection of historic photographs in the Daphne Mayo Dining Room.

Opened in 1918, the historic Royal Theatre is one of the few open-air picture theatres still operating in Australia, and is home to The Big Deck. The Theatre Museum features exhibits of the theatre's history and the Opal Walk, which offers an insight into the local opal industry.

Even when they've seen all these sights (and there are many more), several annual events and festivals are guaranteed to draw visitors back to Winton, such as the multi-award-winning Outback Festival held in September in odd-numbered years; the Outback Century Cycle Challenge; the annual Vision Splendid Outback Film Festival; and the Matilda Country Handicap, which continues a horse racing tradition dating back to the 1880s.

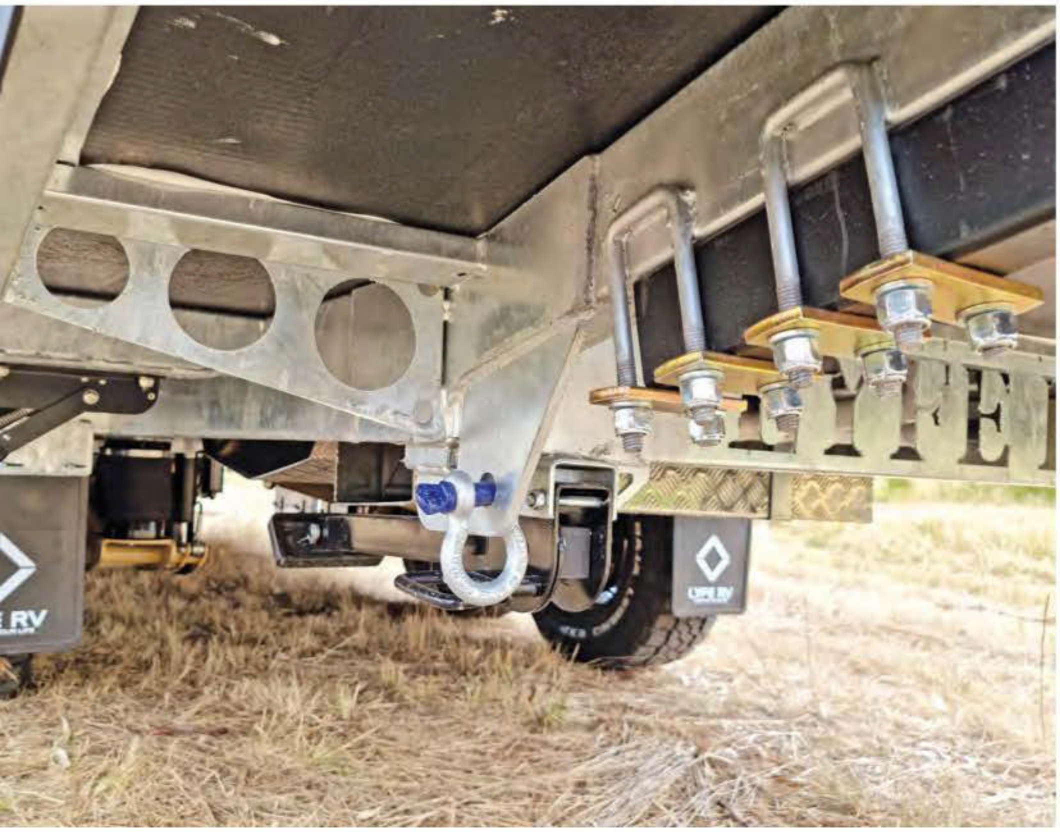
IN BRIEF

- A unique family van that is 6m long and less than 2.2m wide
- Impressive 48V power system eliminating the need for gas
- Creative and functional layout
- Optioned up with a whopping 4.2t ATM

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

A lot of Aussie vans are pretty 'me too'. Lyfe RV bucks the trend with modern manufacturing methods, a different approach to layouts and state-of-the-art 48V power systems.

Words and Pics
JOHN HUGHES



ABOVE AND RIGHT Recovery points complete with shackles; The reviewed van had triple bunks and is aimed at families who are looking for extended touring adventure opportunities

> "The duo are not scared *to try new things*"

Australia has well over 100 RV manufacturers and a big chunk of those are based in Victoria. Many of these Victorian manufacturers are located in the northern suburbs of Melbourne around Campbellfield. There is a proud history of often multigeneration family businesses building a significant industry and creating major employment opportunities in the area. Many new companies have arisen along the way as entrepreneurial employees have broken away to forge their own path in RV manufacturing. As the *Caravan World* journo based in Victoria, I have the opportunity to review many vans that come from this manufacturing hub. In the main, the companies are driven by passionate people building quality, traditional vans.

The majority are meranti frame, aluminium skin-clad structures built to a very similar methodology. Layouts also tend to be very similar among manufacturers. 'Same, same' manufacturing and layouts have evolved because they work and work well. But it feels at times consumers have limited choice.

FRESH APPROACH

Owners of Lyfe RV, Danni Tedesco and her partner Lou, explained to me that they saw an opportunity to do things differently. Chatting with the duo was quite a revelation. They kicked off in January 2020 with no direct experience in the RV industry. They are avid caravanners and have owned multiple caravans over the years. Danni's background is in accounting and she has been involved in construction. Lou also has a mechanical and construction background and the couple saw their skillsets being highly transferrable to the RV industry. The duo researched the market and identified a gap in Victorian manufacturing for high-end offroad products dominated by NSW and Qld players. So, they were confident there was a space for them.

They are also not scared to try new things and have opted to build quite narrow vans that are around the same width as most tow vehicles. This makes them far more suited to negotiating tighter terrain in offroad situations. Lyfe RV started its range with small hybrid-style pop-top vans and has expanded to include full-length, hard-top vans. This brings us to the van on review, Lyfe RV19f Off-Road. As the name suggests, it's 19ft 6in long and we had the triple bunk layout to check out. It's aimed at families who are looking for extended touring capabilities with more adventurous goals of where they take their van.

LYFE RV
LYFE RV19F OFF-ROAD
LYFE RV19F OFF-ROAD

MEASURING UP

PROS

- The narrow profile will find this van venturing down narrower tracks where bigger vans fear to tread
- The 48V electrical system can run your appliances for extended periods and top up very quickly
- As optioned, this van has a massive 1200kg+ payload

CONS

- Some will find access to the main bed and lack of bedside storage not to their liking

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT External hatch table comes in handy; Additional 96L bunk chest fridge; The slide-out kitchen makes great use of the external storage space

> "The floor is a one-piece honeycomb polymer-style material *known for its light weight and strength*"

HUNTER
EAT UR HEART OUT

CONTEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION

The shell is frameless and constructed with contemporary materials. It's not like they are radical, untried materials. It's more a case of materials that have been gradually adopted by the more progressive manufacturers over the last decade or so.

The roof and walls are one-piece composite panels with a fibreglass skin and a foam core. This material does away with the need for an internal frame, but Lyfe RV does specify internal reinforcement in openings such as the doorway and the roof-mounted air-conditioner for greater strength. The floor is a one-piece honeycomb polymer-style material known for its light weight and strength. All these panels are supplied by Creative Composites/Worthingtons who are among the market leaders in this space.

Lou tells me premium polyurethane adhesive is used throughout and silicone is only used for caulking. He reckons the cost for polyurethane per van is around $1000. Sealing is achieved by adhering aluminium corner caps to the walls/roof joints and walls/floor joints. In a previous life I project managed the rework of a range of vans where ABS corner capping had failed. After extensive research we opted for aluminium corner capping similar to that used in this Lyfe van. In my humble opinion, this is a great sealing and good-looking solution.

Selected internal panels such as the queen bed base are powder-coated aluminium rather than the conventional ply. Lou opted for this method for lighter weight and superior moisture resistance.

LYFE RV19F
OFF-ROAD

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Body length 6m (19ft 7in)
Overall length 8.6m (28ft 2in)
Width 2.17m (7ft 1in)
Driving height 3m (9ft 8in)
Tare 2981kg
ATM 4200kg (standard is 3500kg)
Payload 1219kg (calculated)
Ball weight at tare 239kg

EXTERNAL
Frame/cladding Composite panel walls with internal reinforcement at major fastening points
Chassis Hot dip galvanised ARV chassis
Suspension Cruisemaster Stage 3 ATX
Coupling Cruisemaster DO45
Brakes Cruisemaster 12in Electric Brakes
Wheels 17in alloy rims with LT285/70R17 Mickey Thompson Mud Tyres (standard 16in)
Water 330L freshwater and 43L grey water (standard 220L freshwater and 110L grey water)
Battery 600Ah lithium, upgraded to 800Ah
Solar 700W, upgraded to 1210W
Air-conditioner Webasto Cool Top Trail 20/24
Gas Completely gasless system
Sway control BMPRO SwayControl
Cooking Dual hob induction cooktop/3 in 1 convection oven, microwave with air fryer
Fridge Dual Zone myCOOLMAN 96L fridge/freezer

INTERNAL
Cooking Dual hob induction cooktop
Microwave 20L NCE
Fridge Thetford 152L compressor fride/freezer
Bathroom Combination shower and toilet (Separett Tiny urine separating toilet)
Hot water Truma Combi D 6A — diesel hot water and ducted heater system

PRICE FROM $165,000

OPTIONS FITTED
- 48V electrical system
- Extra wheel carrier at the back
- Custom wheels
- LINE-X on the drawbar and toolbox
- Cruisemaster ATX suspension
- ATM upgrade to 4.2t
- Custom toolbox on the front with four jerry can holders
- Black Jack Electric Trailer Jack
- One additional 110L freshwater storage tank
- Breville combination cooker with air fry, convection and microwave
- Washing machine — mini
- Solar panel upgrades to 1210W
- Extra in pump room, six double USB and six cigarette
- Anti-sway BMPRO sway controller
- SavvyLevel

PRICE AS SHOWN $205,000

MORE INFORMATION
Lyfe RV
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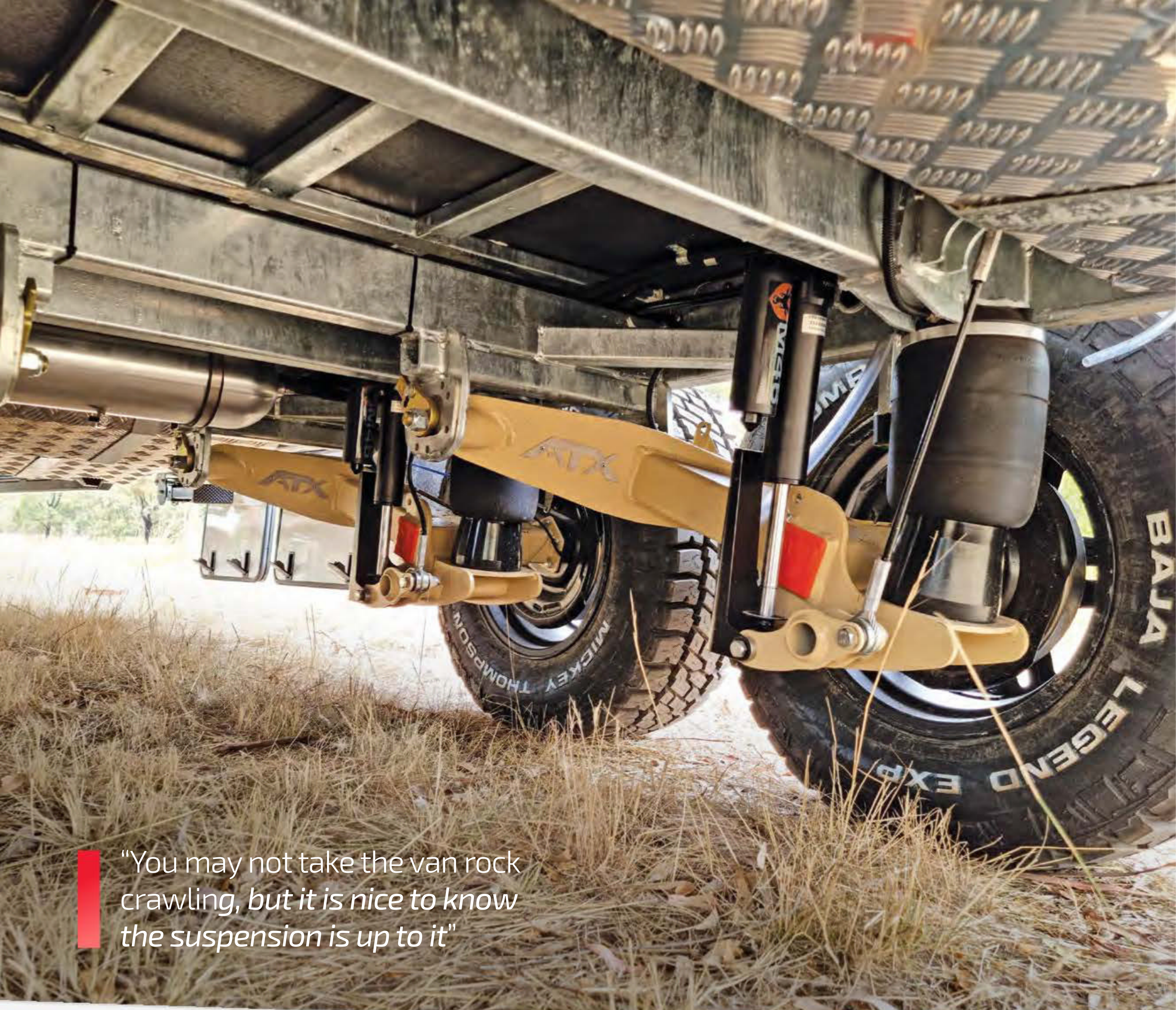
E: info@lyferv.com
W: lyferv.com



"You may not take the van rock crawling, *but it is nice to know the suspension is up to it*"

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Four jerry can holders and a firewood box up front; Cruisemaster ATX suspension; Interior kitchen with induction cooktop

RUNNING GEAR

The chassis is a pretty typical Australian-made steel setup manufactured by ARV with 150mm main beams. The A-frame features a black coating known as LINE-X which looks pretty rugged. An optional Black Jack trailer jack upfront takes the effort out of getting the van up and down and there's a conventional jockey wheel there just for back up. Recovery points complete with shackles are attached to the rear of the chassis and are at the ready if you need to be pulled out of a tricky situation.

This model had been optioned up to the Cruisemaster ATX trailing arm independent suspension complete with airbag springs. This is the top-of-the-range offer from Cruisemaster, classified as suitable for prolonged corrugations and rock crawling! You may not take the van rock crawling, but it is nice to know the suspension is up to it. The bells and whistles include the Cruisemaster air control kit which enables you to adjust the ride height for greater ground clearance when you need it, plus automatically level the van when parked up.

Cruisemaster also takes care of the coupling up front. It's a pin coupling with multi-axis articulation which is ideal for offroad applications. We see a lot of D035 (rated to 3.5t) couplings on the vans we review, but this van had the D045 (rated to 4.5t). This is because the customer asked for an ATM upgrade of 4200kg to accommodate some of the options and achieve a whopping 1200kg+ payload. More on that later.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE LIVING

Lyfe RV has a different approach to how it uses its inside and outside space. I think it is partly influenced by the fact it builds hybrid vans, which tend to have a stronger focus on outdoor living, and partly attributed to lateral thinking. Plus, it is driven by the necessity of a narrow van having limited space to work with. The way I see it, internal space is finite and external access is practically infinite.

So here are some things that are different mainly from an external perspective. The washing machine sits under the queen bed and is accessed externally via a large hatch. The pantry is accessible both internally and externally. Again, the external access is via a hatch which also serves as a decent-sized table. The two fridges cover all bases. There is a tall but quite narrow Thetford 152L compressor fridge/freezer just inside the doorway – probably because there is nowhere else to put it, but it also means you can grab some food without traipsing through the van.

There's a second fridge/freezer (dual zone myCOOLMAN 96L chest style) accessed externally from a slide-out. On the same slide-out is a fancy cooker combination convection oven, microwave and air fryer. And on another slide-out is a comprehensive camp kitchen complete with an induction cooker. All this externally accessed stuff is much more user-friendly than the cramped setup you would have with internal access.

There is plenty of storage in the toolbox upfront because there is no need for gas bottles. On top of the box is a neat firewood tray and in front of the toolbox are four jerry can holders.

Taking a look at the inside, the feel is quite different. You do notice that the van is narrower. It is most apparent in the queen bed area where room on either side of the bed is limited. There are quite narrow wardrobes on either side of the bed but no bedside drawers like you see in most vans. The space on either side of the bed is closed off with a long narrow horizontal surface which could be used for storing bits and pieces, but this means you can't walk around either side of the bed. This means that you enter the bed from the foot. As the bed is quite tall to provide under-bed storage, most people will find it easiest to step up onto the lounge to get into bed. This won't suit everybody, but I think it is a perfectly functional compromise.

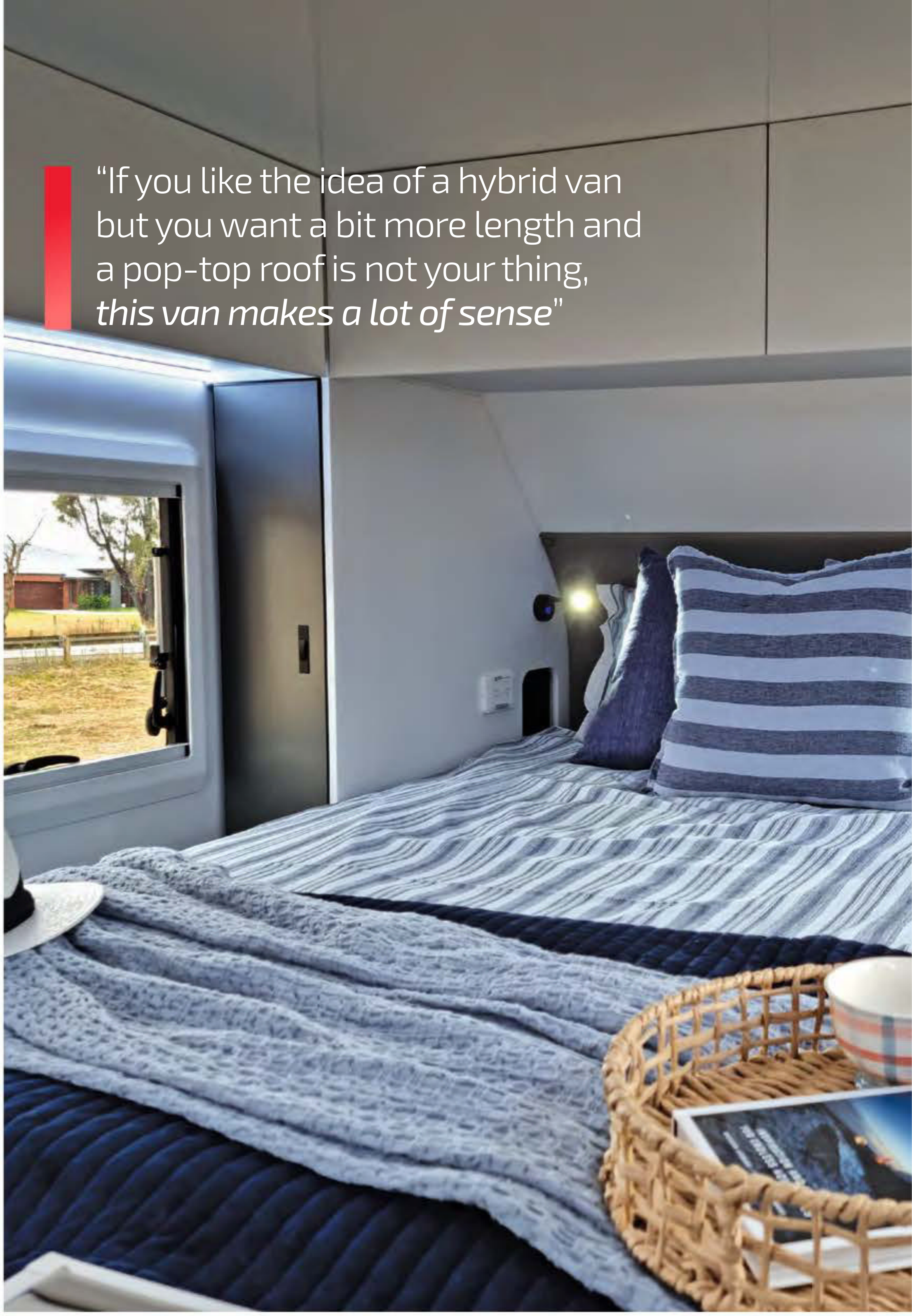
The kitchen area feels more typical with good storage but the standout feature for me is the induction cooktop. My experience at home is they are a pleasure to cook with due to their rapid boiling capabilities. The seating is decently sized for five people and very comfortable. The bunks are quite typical, but the bathroom is more compact than most vans of this length featuring a combination shower and toilet rather than a separate shower and toilet. Another interesting difference is the Separett urine separating toilet. It is designed to separate solid and liquid waste, to reduce smell and volume of waste to be handled.

CUTTING EDGE OFF GRID

Lyfe RV has gone the whole hog with a 48V system powering the entire van, allowing extended use of all appliances off grid and eliminating the need for gas. Put simply, 48V setups can be far more efficient than 12V systems, allowing you to put more power in quickly and have access to more power to run more things for longer.

The system is fed with 1210W of solar panels and 12-48V 1.5kW DC to DC charge converters, giving great solar backup. What's more, the system is online with remote support 24/7, giving peace of mind for travellers.

A bank of Safiery Lithium batteries total 800Ah and give you plenty of storage, and a 6000W inverter delivers that power to run appliances. Lou tells me that you can run multiple electrical items at one time,



> "If you like the idea of a hybrid van but you want a bit more length and a pop-top roof is not your thing, *this van makes a lot of sense*"

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
This is a big budget van with no expense spared — if you've got the money, it has a lot to offer

TOWABILITY
The van comes standard with a 3500kg ATM but has been optioned up to a 4200kg ATM which calls for a serious tow vehicle

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
If extended offroad touring with a penchant for outdoor living is your thing, Lyfe RV hits the mark

BUILD QUALITY
You wouldn't think for a moment that these guys are new to building RVs — it looked great

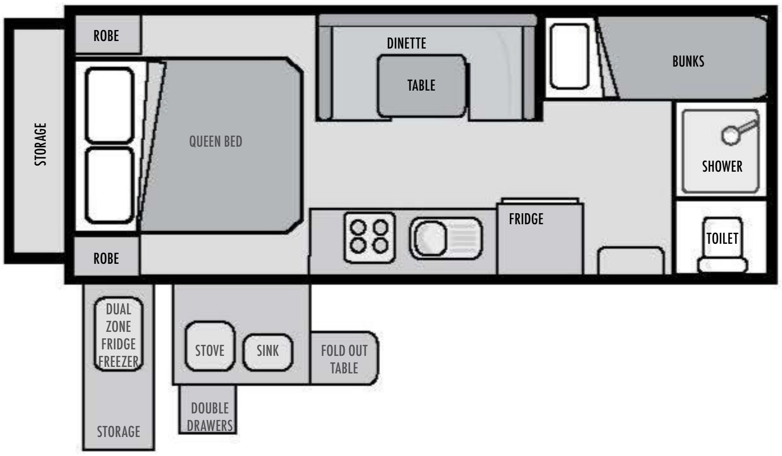
LIVEABILITY
Highly functional layout for its width. While I find it agreeable, some may find the narrow setup too much of a compromise

SELF-SUFFICIENCY
Outstanding capacity for living off the grid for extended periods with an abundance of power and freshwater

CUSTOMER CARE
The warranty program on offer is in the upper half of the scale but not at the top

INNOVATION
Lyfe RV stands out from the crowd with a unique combination of contemporary materials, a distinctive layout and a cutting-edge 48V power system

X-FACTOR
The technology and creativity that goes into this van makes it top shelf



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Easily accessible fridge; There is limited space around the queen bed; Triple bunk layout; Table and seating for the family

including the air-conditioner for nine hours straight in 30+ degrees ambient temperature before the system warned the battery was getting low.

The van comes standard with 220L of freshwater storage and 110L grey water storage. The owner has optioned 330L of freshwater and cut back to 43L of grey water capacity. If you are in locations where you can run water on the ground, all good, but it will be a problem if you are in locations that do require capturing grey water. All this freshwater is pushed around with twin pumps. A second pump gives you some redundancy and you can use it to draw water from a creek to replenish your supply.

HEAVY BUT NARROW TOWING

As previously mentioned, this model would normally be rated with an ATM of 3500kg but has been uprated to 4200kg. This means when loaded, the LandCruiser 300 pictured would not make the cut. So, you are definitely in big American pickup truck territory to tow this beauty. We towed with the van empty, and it cruised along comfortably on freeways, country-style roads and a little bit of playing on easy offroad.

One of the van's claims to fame is an external width of 2170mm, making it appreciably narrower than most other comparable vans. Visibility out the back is great, and Lou opts not to run towing mirrors as a result. While we didn't try to drive through anywhere squeezy, I can see the narrow profile would be advantageous.

CUSTOMER CARE

Lyfe RV offers a typical warranty of five years on chassis and suspension and two years on its factory build. Third-party components are referred to respective suppliers which is not uncommon in the industry but is short of best practice where the van manufacturer takes full responsibility for the van in its entirety.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This van won't be for everyone. First of all, you'll need a big budget. And the interior layout dictated by the narrow design may put some people off. Having said that, there is a lot to like about this van. If you like the idea of a hybrid van but you want a bit more length for better internal seating and mod cons like a washing machine, and a pop-top roof is not your thing, this van makes a lot of sense. Plus, the amazing performance of this 48V power system is pretty compelling.

INSTALLING A REDARC TOW-PRO ELITE BRAKE CONTROLLER

John Ford details the process for fitting a REDARC Tow-Pro Elite brake controller to his 2012 200 series LandCruiser.

Word and Pics *John Ford*

REDARC
Universal Extended
REDARC
Tow-Pro
REDARC

ABOVE The REDARC Tow-Pro kit ready to install

Having just moved over to a low-milage 2012 GX 200 series LandCruiser from my trusty old 100, the first thing I noticed was the very ordinary brake controller. It was old school, and it wasn't a REDARC. But on the other hand, I was used to the proportional braking and minute adjustment of the Tow-Pro Elite in the trusty 100.

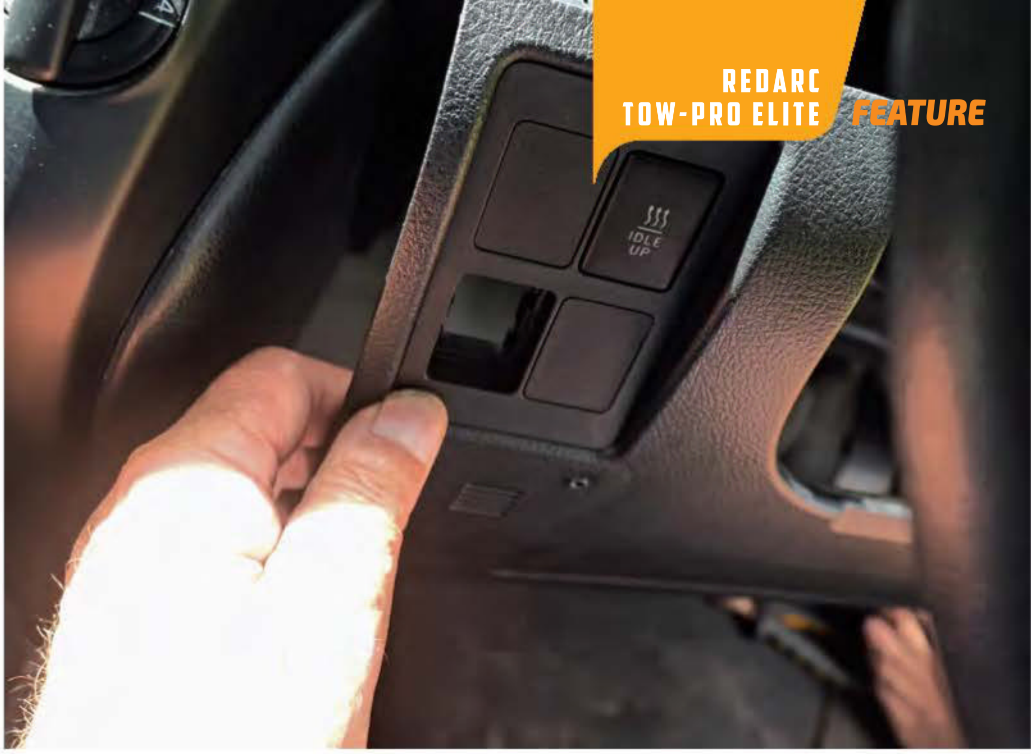
So, time to upgrade. REDARC has planted the Tow-Pro Elite as the go-to system for heavy-duty caravan towing. Introduced in 2014, I've yet to experience anything that comes close.

The beauty of the Elite is that in proportional mode, the controller senses how hard you are braking from its three-axis accelerometer and adds braking pressure as needed. The more you brake, the more the REDARC applies stopping power to the caravan.

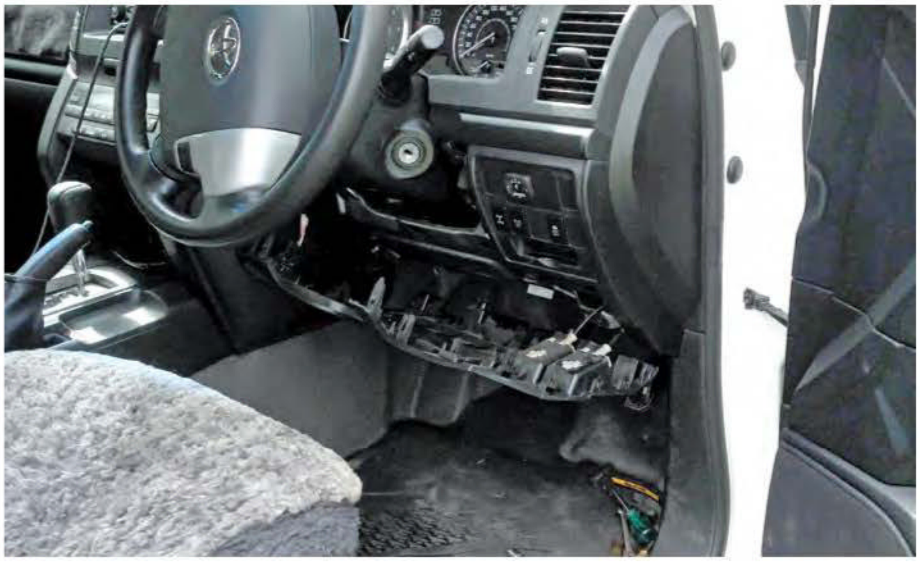
The Tow-Pro has two modes, and they can be switched when stationary by setting the remote head to 0, holding the brake pedal and pushing the remote button twice. The colour of the head will change from blue to green. Blue is proportional auto-braking, and green is user control mode where you set the amount of braking you want for different road conditions – when offroad in soft sand conditions, for example. The override ability is also crucial because you can apply light braking to the caravan brakes by pushing the remote button to help stabilise the van if it starts to sway.

REDARC offers universal wiring kits to suit various vehicles. We chose the Universal Extended Wiring Kit with the Tow-Pro Elite and a universal loom to connect back to the existing trailer plug and the battery. REDARC has instructions on its website, and with the kits, so I was confident I could fit the brake controller successfully.

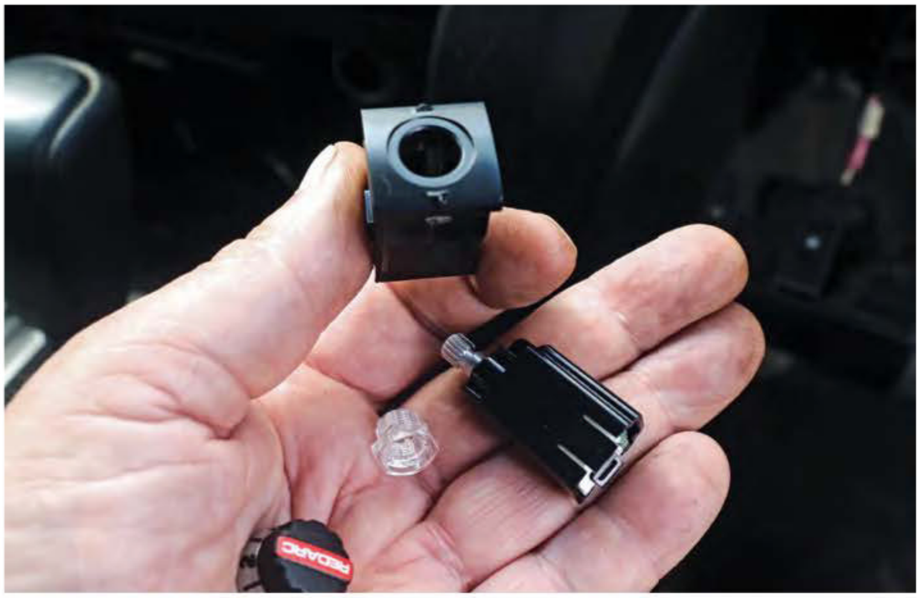
The kit comes with the main controller, the remote head and the wiring looms for connecting them. The main controller needs to be mounted securely inside the vehicle cabin, as its movement sensors must be calibrated to learn its orientation and which way is up. I started by removing the facia under the LandCruiser's steering wheel and a higher panel to the right. This gave access to a spare blank to fit the remote head and an easily accessible space for the controller. It's possible to install the remote control knob closer to the centre of the dash where it's easier to see and where the passenger might use the manual override in an emergency. But you may need to drill a hole in the facia to fit the control knob.



STEP 1 Remove the left side dash panel



STEP 2 The lower dash removed



STEP 3 The remote control

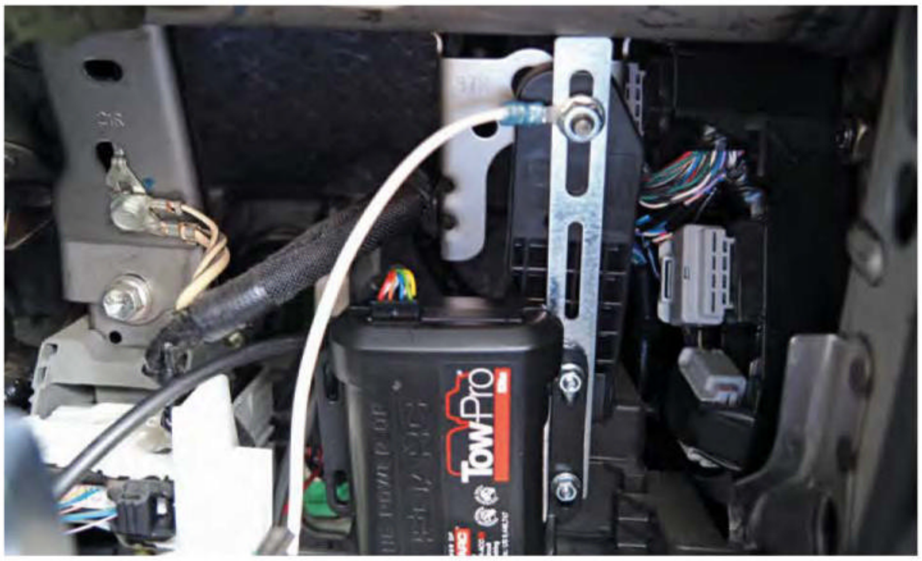
STEP 4 The remote control installed

Next, I fed the long loom back through a rubber grommet in the firewall and plugged the three colour-coded wires into the main controller. The black wire goes to the start battery, and the red and blue cables lead back along the chassis rail to the trailer plug.

To make the connection to the existing brake light wire very secure and foolproof, REDARC includes a waterproof wago push-in terminal to connect the new loom to the brake light circuit. It makes sense when you follow the instructions, but in essence, you remove the red lead to the existing trailer plug for the brake light, plug it into the connector and then run the red lead from the new loom to the trailer plug and connect it to position 6. This process solves the issue of trying to screw two wires into the slot in the trailer plug where there is only space for one. Next, remove the blue wire, tape it off and insert the new loom blue wire into the trailer plug at position five for the service brakes (on a round or flat seven-pin plug).

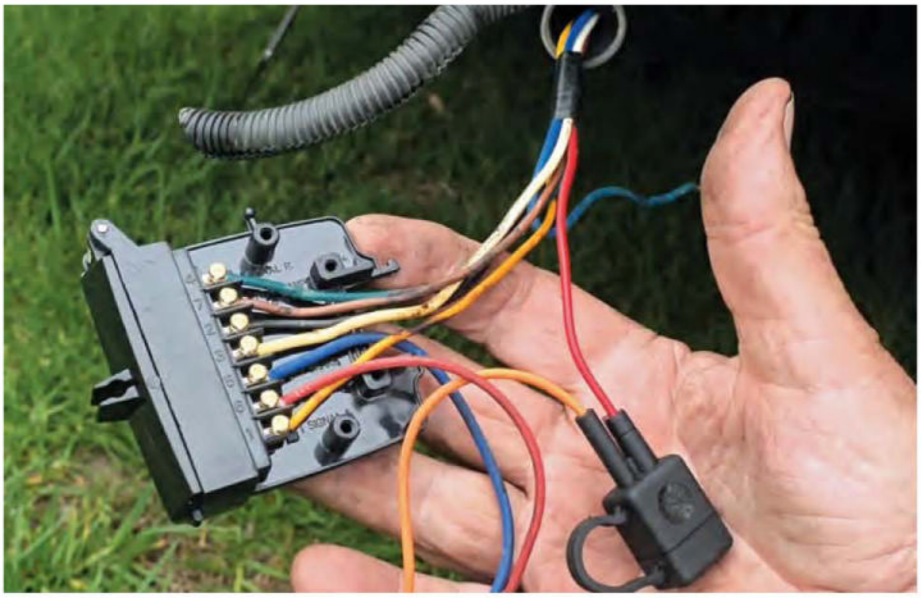
The final step is to connect the black wire to the positive terminal on your start battery. The Tow-Pro Elite automatically calibrates without having the van connected. You need to drive around in a secluded location and safely apply the brakes 10-15 times to a complete stop.

The REDARC Tow-Pro Elite with the remote, main controller and basic wiring retails for $399. The Extended Wiring kit comes complete at $593.



STEP 5 Bolt the controller to the firewall

STEP 6 Click the wires into the controller plug



STEP 7 The trailer plug

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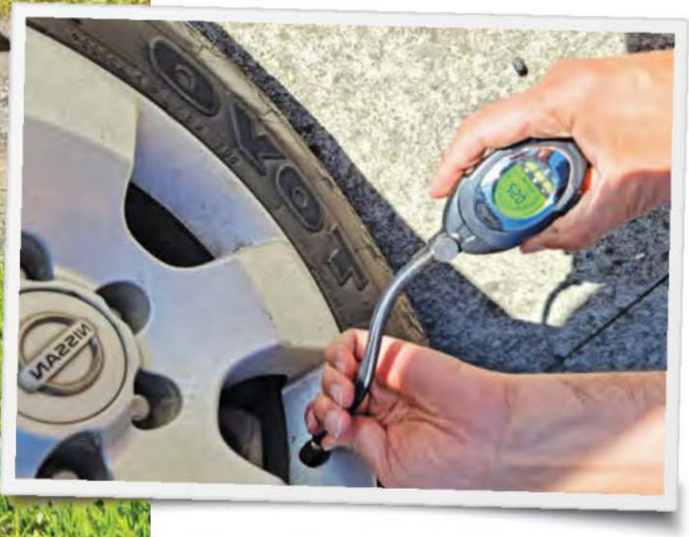
EVERNEW
WARRIOR
TWIN TURBO

Word and Pics John Hughes

Taking care of your van might be second nature before any trip, but maintaining your tow vehicle is just as important for a safe journey.

GET YOUR TOW VEHICLE READY



LEFT AND ABOVE Pulling a van is hard work for your tow vehicle; Check tyre pressure

There are many aspects to making and keeping a tow vehicle 'tow worthy'. Tow vehicles are fitted with a number of accessories specifically related to towing, such as tow bars and electrical connections to name a couple. Setting the car up correctly for towing is something that can be overlooked, such as running different tyre pressures. A vehicle also works harder when lugging a caravan around, so a regular maintenance routine can become even more important. On top of this, understanding and correctly loading the tow vehicle is critical. Some of us have modern vehicles with fancy gadgets and low kilometres. Some of us have older tugs that need more attention and TLC. While we don't have room to cover everything, this article tackles some of the basics of these issues.

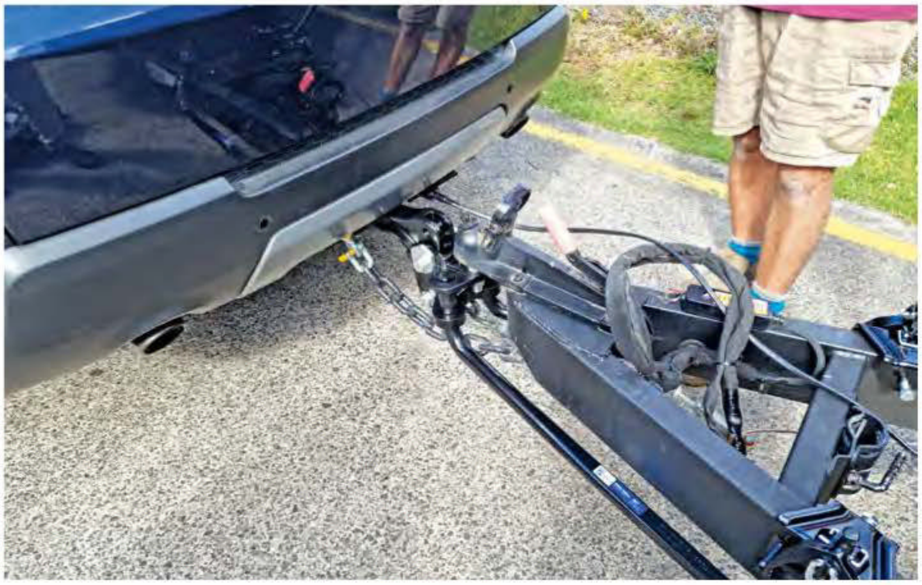
TOW EQUIPMENT

The connection between the tow vehicle and van is among the most fundamental of all considerations. It starts with the towbar bolted to the chassis. The bolts should be checked periodically that they are tight. On older vehicles, the towbar should also be checked for excessive corrosion. The towball tongue is retained in the towbar with a hitch pin, and this should be visually inspected for correct fitment, irregular wear or corrosion and that the retaining clip is in place. Similarly, the towball or pin should be checked for irregular wear and that it is correctly rated for the application.

Some tow vehicles can benefit from a weight distribution hitch to improve the handling and safety of the rig. A caravan can impart a heavy load on the rear of the tow vehicle causing the rear of the car to sag and the front to rise. A 'light front end' causes the front tyres to have less contact patch on the ground which is detrimental to braking and cornering. A weight distribution hitch lifts some of the load off the car's rear axles and transfers it to the front axles, restoring balance. It is worth noting that some vehicle manufacturers specify weight distribution hitches as mandatory, while others prohibit their use.

Caravans are generally wider than tow vehicles, which limits the driver's rear visibility with side mirrors. Wider mirrors are usually required by law to address rear visibility and to be able to see down the sides of the van. Broadly, tow mirrors come in two forms. The most basic types are secondary mirrors that temporarily attach to your vehicle that sit out wider than standard. The fancier types are aftermarket mirrors that replace the factory mirrors and can be moved to a wider position when towing and then moved back in when not towing. Another very useful form of rear vision enhancement is cameras. Fundamentally, a camera is attached to the rear of the van and the image is sent to a screen mounted inside the tow vehicle. While very useful, they do not supersede the need for mirrors.

> *"Understanding and correctly loading the tow vehicle* is critical"



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Check your towbar mounting bolts; A weight distribution hitch can improve handling; Check tyre wear; Ensure the towball nut is tight

Another critical piece of safety equipment is the tow vehicle's brake controller. This is a device installed in the car which sends a signal to the caravan to activate its own brakes when you put your foot on the brake. This system is in place because in nearly all instances the tow vehicle manufacturer will require the van to have its own braking power so the car is not doing all the stopping work. The brake controller can be adjusted to vary the amount of braking force applied to the van when the car brakes are applied.

We can't overlook the humble trailer plug that sends light signals to the van for tail lights, brake lights and indicators. The obvious thing to do is check all the lights are working when you hook up. A handy little trick is to turn the hazard lights on instead of the indicators so you can check left and right in one go.

CAR SETUP

There are also variables that you can change in your tow vehicle to make it safer for towing. Most car manufacturers will call for higher tyre pressures when loaded, such as when a caravan is connected. This is to protect the tyres from deforming. Refer to your car manual for your specific requirements.

ABOVE The hitch pin and clip are basic but critical components

Many modern vehicles now feature advanced driver assistance systems known as ADAS. They are designed to detect hazardous situations and if necessary, take control of braking, acceleration and steering to prevent collisions. In some vehicles, some functions are not compatible or behave differently when a trailer is connected. These are generally related to monitoring and responding to what is happening behind the tow vehicle. Some ADAS features may interpret the caravan as another separate vehicle and initiate steps to prevent what it interprets as a potential collision scenario. Therefore, some vehicles have a requirement to turn off certain features when towing. Others require you to input the length of the trailer behind you, so ADAS knows when it is dealing with a separate vehicle or not. Other vehicles simply require a tow mode to be selected so it will sort out what features should be running and how when a trailer is connected.

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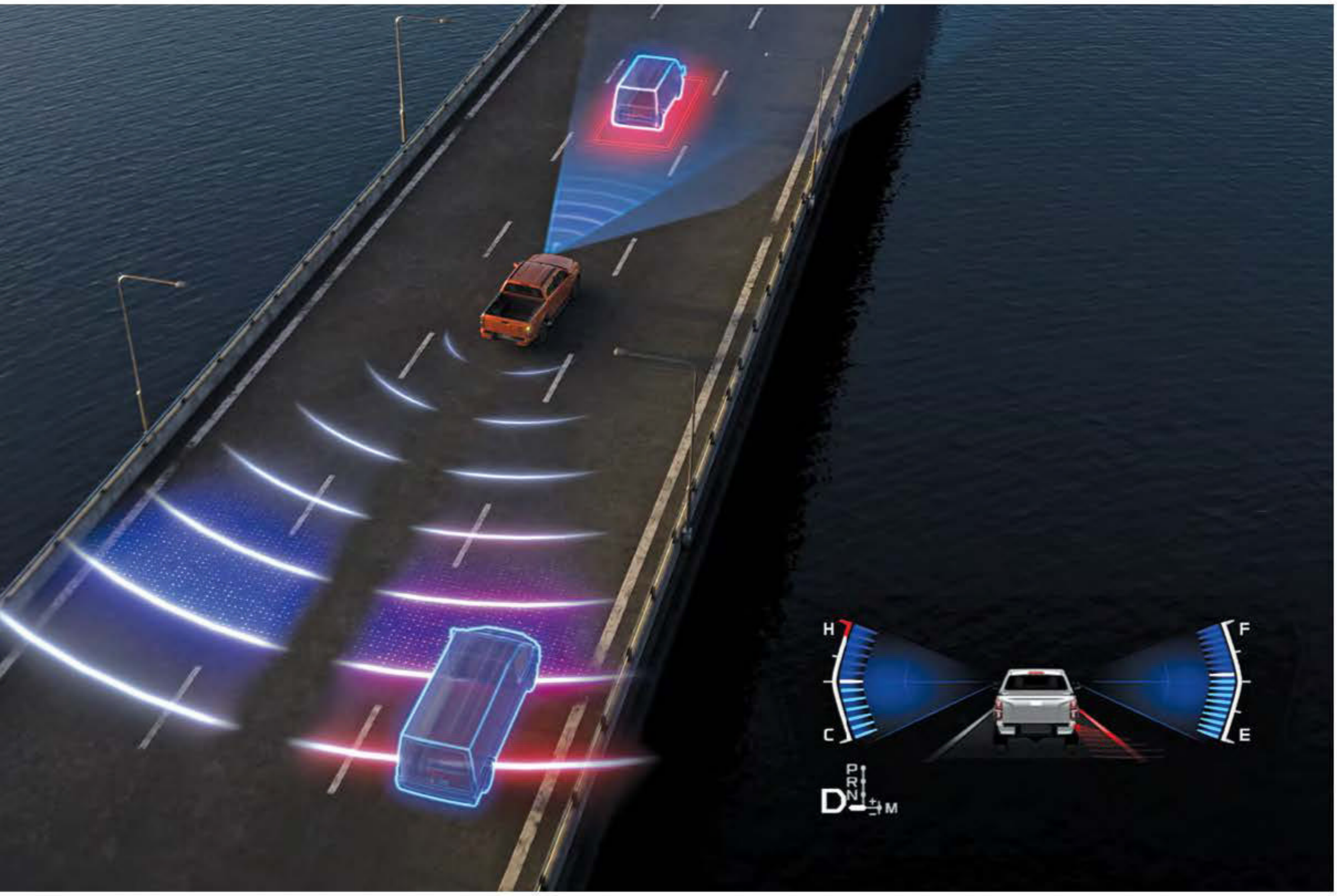
MAINTENANCE

Vehicle maintenance is always important and particularly so for a tow vehicle due to the extra loads involved. In fact, car manufacturers often call for more frequent servicing if the vehicle is regularly used for towing, so it pays to check your manual carefully for special requirements. One of the main reasons for regular maintenance and checks is heat and time cause vehicle fluids to degrade. Leaks can also cause fluid levels to drop. So the basics should include checking the levels for your engine oil, coolant fluid, brake fluid, power steering fluid and automatic transmission fluid if accessible. It is critical if you do a top up that you add fluids that are compatible with what you already have in your system as the wrong fluid can cause major system failures.

Inspections should also include keeping an eye on the tyre treads for wear, particularly as it may be accelerated with towing. Tyres have little bumps protruding partway up the depth of their main grooves. When the tyre wears down to the level of these wear indicator bumps, the tyre needs to be replaced. Signs of uneven wear should also be monitored. Wear on one side of the tyre indicates there is some form of misalignment that needs to be corrected. Wear on the outside edge of tyres indicates under-inflation and wear through the centre of the tyre indicates over-inflation.

Vehicles that have operated in offroad or outback conditions can end up with dirt or other debris clogging the fins in radiators or transmission coolers, preventing airflow and thus overheating. A gentle application of compressed air can be used to clear the delicate fins without damaging them.

Another preventative measure worth doing is to check that your CV rubbers are not torn, cracked or otherwise damaged. A damaged rubber will allow grease to escape and moisture and dirt to get in causing premature failure.



ABOVE AND BELOW Use a correctly weighted towball; Some vehicles require certain safety features to be turned off when towing

LOADING

There are several critical load requirements relating to your car when you are towing. We can't stress enough never to attach a van to your car without understanding and complying with the below so you can remain safe and legal. The first and easiest to understand is your vehicle's tow rating. Put simply, this is how much weight the car can pull and equally importantly, stop with. Next is the towball rating which is how much weight can be imparted on the rear of the car at the towball. It doesn't seem to come up so often but you should be aware of the front and rear axle load ratings of your car. A heavy van is going to put a lot more load on your rear axle and take some load off your front axle. However, accessories such as bullbars and winches add considerably more load to your front axle.

Getting a little more complex is the gross vehicle mass (GVM). This is the total weight the tow vehicle can be when loaded. This includes luggage, passengers, accessories fitted to the car and importantly, the portion of the weight of the van imparted onto the vehicle. And the most complex is gross combined mass (GCM). This is a spec determined by the car manufacturer stating what the total maximum weight of the car and van/trailer can be when they are loaded. You need to be careful because this number can be lower than the sum of the GVM and ATM (total weight allowed for the van). The reality is the only way you are going to know if you comply with these weight requirements is to weigh the tow vehicle and van.

WRAP UP

There are a lot of areas to stay on top of to keep your tow vehicle running and handling well, plus stay safe and legal. Many just involve the simple discipline to perform routine checks. Others involve always being conscious about how your rig is loaded. For most people, some jobs are best left to the professionals, but the more you understand, the more likely you are to catch a problem in between services. A final piece of advice, if you hear or feel something out of the ordinary, don't ignore it because most probably it is something that needs to be addressed.

IF IN DOUBT, CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL

Improper maintenance could lead to injury, death or property damage. Maintenance work of this nature should only be undertaken by persons with suitable mechanical competence. The information provided is general in nature, not comprehensive, and can only be taken as a guide. Individual discretion must be exercised and persons undertaking described tasks do so completely at their own risk. Publishers and creators of this content accept no responsibility for loss or damage.

> "There are a lot of areas to stay on top *of to keep your tow vehicle running and handling well*"

BELOW The only way to know your tow vehicle's load is to weigh it

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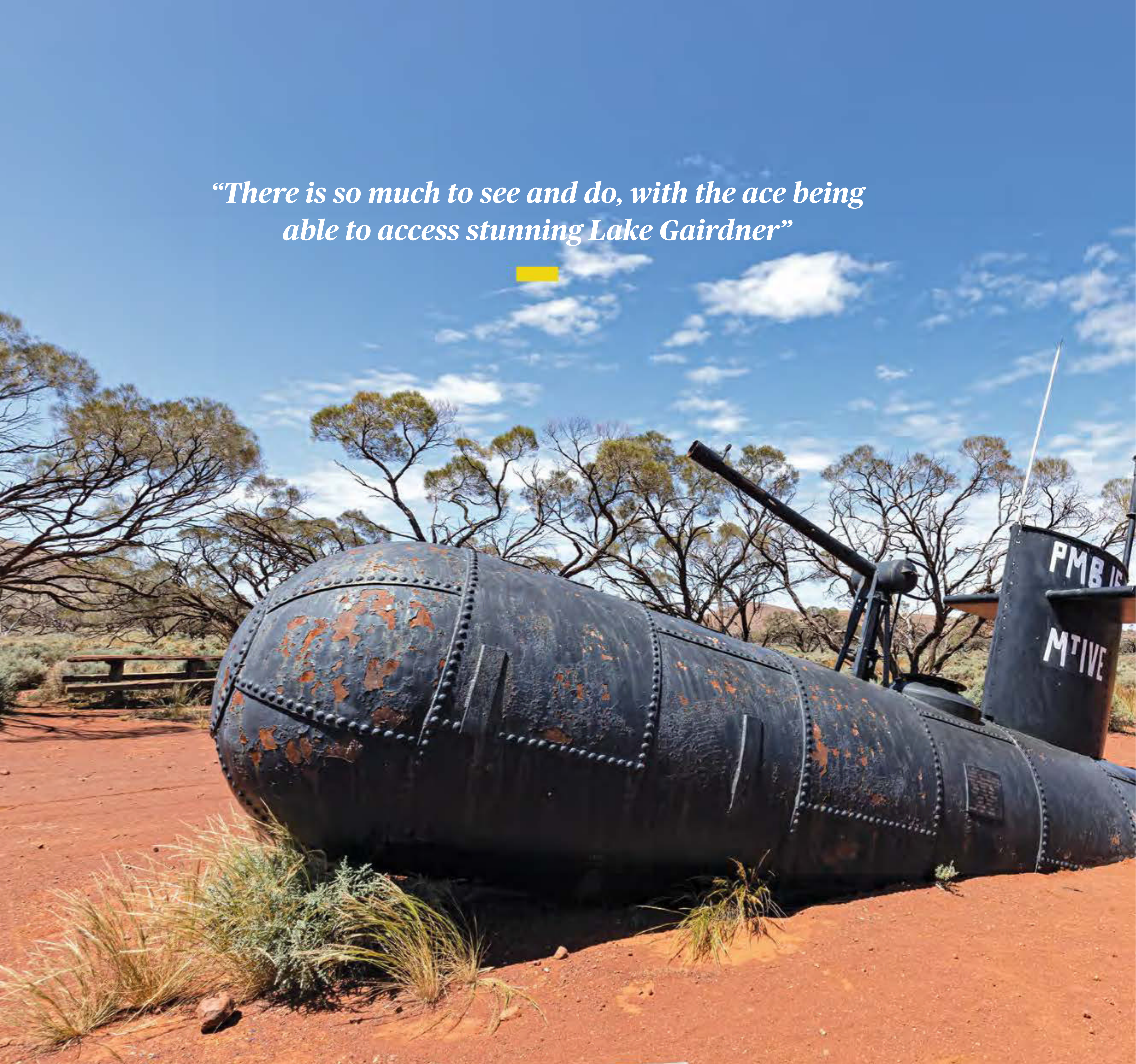
DRIVING MOUNT IVE

When it comes to station stays, Mount Ive has something for everyone.

Words and Pics **GLENN MARSHALL**



“There is so much to see and do, with the ace being able to access stunning Lake Gairdner”

RAIN, RAIN, GO AWAY

The rain fell as we quickly departed South Australia’s Gawler Ranges National Park and made a dash for Mount Ive Station. The roads were still holding up well with the rain, just enough to stop the dust and coat the camper in a thin layer of mud. You can’t miss the entrance to Mount Ive, especially with a submarine parked out the front.

The campground was empty with the wet weather keeping the grey nomads on the bitumen. It was a shame as the roads were still open and in good condition, and Mount Ive is a great place to be stranded for a few days if the access roads are closed for a short period. There is so much to see and do, with the ace being able to access stunning Lake Gairdner.

ROOMS
FLIGHT
PATH
LOOKOUT
CAMPING
MT SCOTT
BILLY
CAN

Arriving in time for happy hour was a bonus, with the bar open from 5-7pm every day. This is a great opportunity to chat with fellow travellers and station workers. There was a group of kiwis staying, Team NZ, who were attempting to smash the world land sailing record on Lake Gairdner. It was great to hear how they were going, and the challenges faced especially with so much rain falling recently.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT It's impossible to miss the entrance of Mount Ive Station; Strike a pose; Watching the sunset from Lake Gairdner was special; The tracks are well signposted

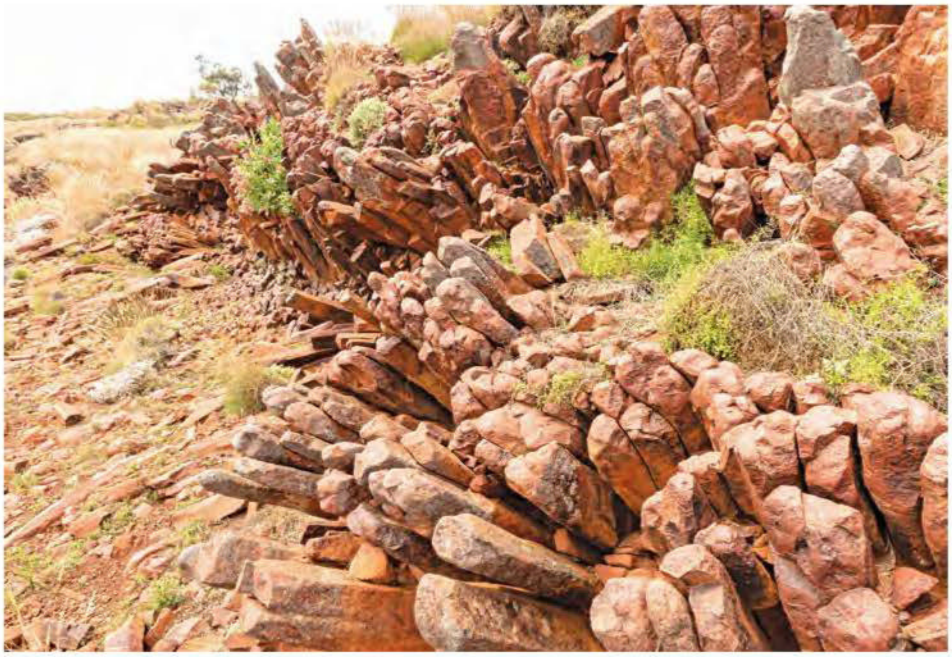
LAKE GAIRDNER

The next morning the weatherman was incorrect, with the predicted 8mm of rain for 10am not eventuating. We took the opportunity to pay $90 ($45 per vehicle) for the map book, which provides access to Lake Gairdner (via a key), and several station tracks for the time of our visit. We then headed out to the lake in the hope of taking some amazing photos. Unfortunately, some rain arrived, and the dark clouds made it difficult to capture good shots of the white salt lake. The good thing is you can access the lake as many times as you like during your stay.

Seeing so much water on the lake was amazing, yet the salt crust was still as solid as a rock and easy to walk on – although gumboots would have been handy. After spending a couple of hours at the lake, which included checking out the Team NZ yacht (a work of technological art), we made our way back to the homestead, but not before taking a couple of detours.

The first detour was to The Embankment, a stone dam wall constructed in 1892. It was a brilliant piece of architecture that still holds water back after all these years. Our next stop was to check out some organ pipes. It is a grade three walk to view these stunning geological rock formations, with some rock hopping and a short climb to the best viewpoint.

On the homestead driveway, we parked at the graveyard that contains two graves, the children of Dan Ross, who was the station manager in the late 1800s, before walking up the hill to find the ancient gamma holes used by Aboriginals for water. Carved out of the rock, the holes collect water whenever it rains, providing a valuable water source.



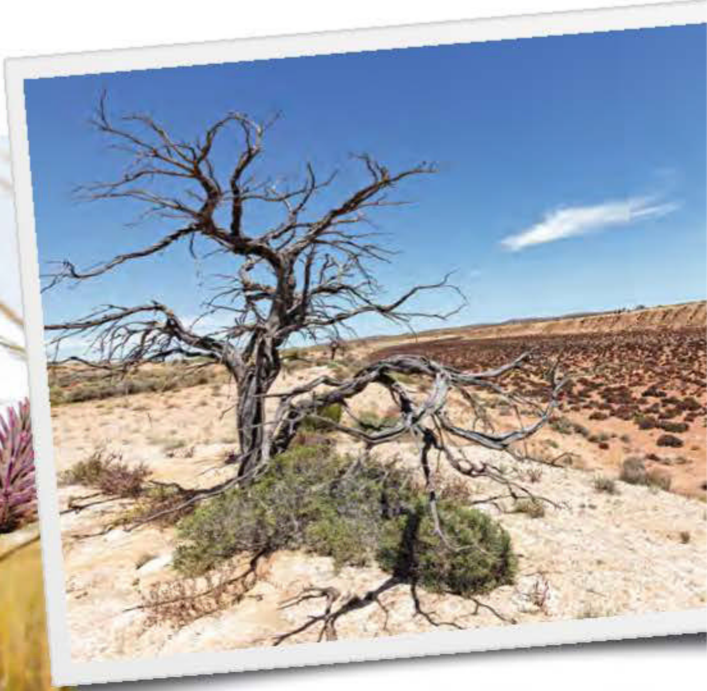
ABOVE AND BELOW Billy Can Drive is one of the easier tracks; Rhyolite columns are geological wonders

EXPLORING THE STATION TRACKS

1. Billy Can Drive – allow 2-3 hours: This is a scenic drive with some slow sections through the dry creek beds and there is a nice little detour to view some small rhyolite columns (organ pipes). We climbed some of the station hills and then drove along the valleys, spear grass dancing in the breeze. It was so tall in places that it was difficult to follow the track and complex to spot the kangaroos until the last minute as they blended in so well with the yellows of the spinifex and grass and the grey-green saltbush. Herds of goats would also disappear into the tall grass.

Wildflowers were abundant along the drive. This was a special time to visit with such a wet spring, and we also spotted a male emu with seven or so chicks. This drive is highly recommended and suitable for high-clearance 4WD vehicles only.

> *"The views across the saltpan are excellent and the silence is serene – it is a great place for reflection"*



ABOVE AND RIGHT Mula Mula hides among the spear grass; It was so quiet at the Wombat Holes, a perfect place to sit and reflect

2. Wombat Holes – **allow 1-2 hours:** Located close to the homestead, this short drive takes you past several well-established wombat holes and you may even be lucky enough to spot one on the hunt for roots and leaves. You'll be amazed at how many holes there are and how large some of them are. The views across the saltpan are excellent and the silence is serene – it is a great place for reflection. This drive is accessible to 2WD vehicles in dry weather.

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“The views across the property and the Gawler Ranges are superb from up at the Mount Ive Summit”

3. The Pillars – allow 1 hour:
Here you will find one of the best rhyolite column displays in the Gawler Ranges and they are easily accessed with 2WD vehicles during dry weather. It is only a short walk up the creek and you can climb up the hillside to view the organ pipes up close.

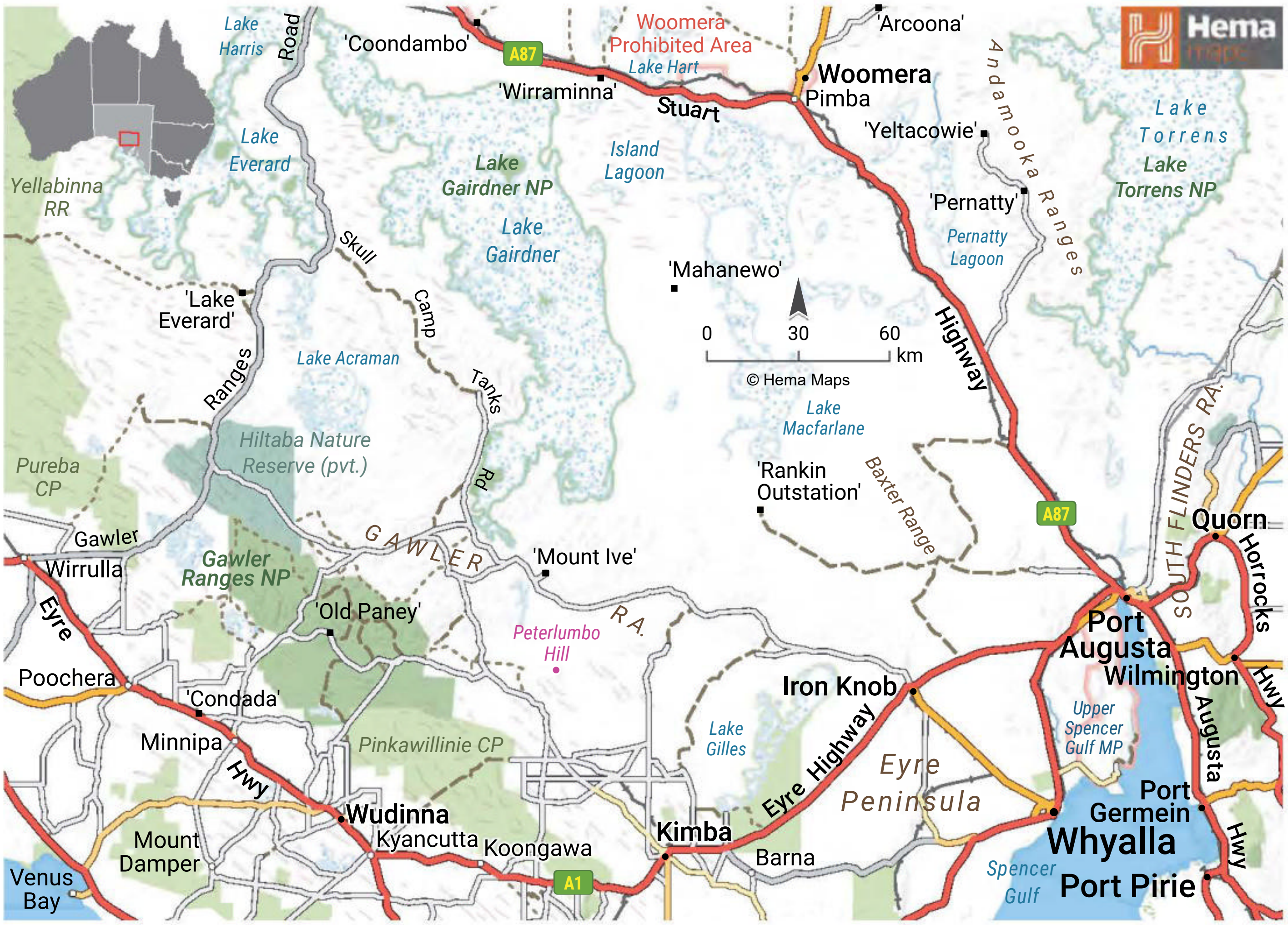
4. Mount Ive Summit – allow 2–3 hours:
This challenge is for experienced four-wheel drivers with high-clearance vehicles and is not recommended when wet. The views across the property and Gawler Ranges are superb from up here and you might even find a couple of bars on your phone if you’re with Telstra.

5. Mount Scott – allow 2–3 hours:
This is a cracking drive with a slow, steep and rocky climb up to the peak that offers splendid views that rival those seen from the Mount Ive summit. It is rated as medium, and a high-clearance 4WD is required. Watching a sunrise or sunset from up here would be perfect.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT There are plenty of campsites available; Spear grass dominates the plains; Dad was happy to look after the kids

FAST FACTS

1. **Billabong Waterhole:** This remote infinity pool is an excellent spot to cool down on a hot day, with tables and chairs making it an ideal picnic spot as well.
2. **Bush Golf:** A 10-hole short course has been created and clubs can be hired from reception.
3. **Recreation Room:** The perfect place to read a book and chill, challenge the grandkids to a game of table tennis or test your skills on the dartboard.
4. **Use UHF Ch 7 (duplex)** to contact the homestead in an emergency.
5. **The Bar:** Open seven days from 5-7pm — enjoy a cold can, a glass of wine or a coffee while chatting with the locals. Limited supplies can also be purchased from reception. Wi-fi should now be available thanks to Starlink and even the staff are excited about that.


Hema maps
Lake Harris
Road
'Coondambo'
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Woomera Prohibited Area
Lake Hart
'Arcoona'
Woomera
Pimba
'Wirraminna'
Stuart
'Yeltacowie'
Andamooka Ranges
Lake Torrens
Lake Torrens NP
Lake Everard
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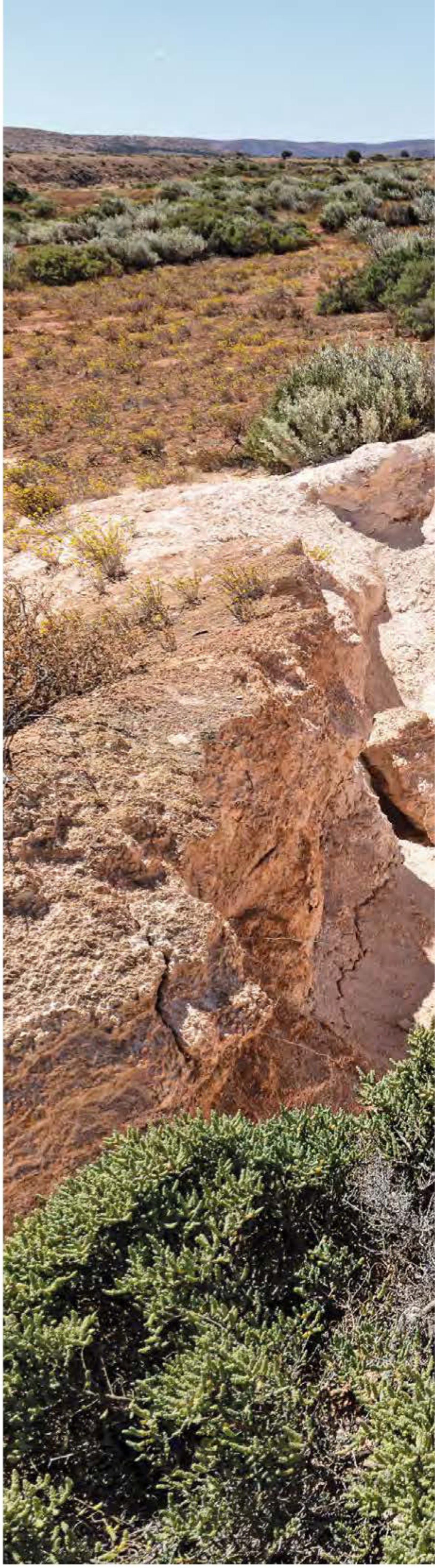
Wirrulla
GAWLER RA.
'Mount Ive'
Gawler Ranges NP
SOUTH FLINDERS RA.
Horrocks
Eyre
'Old Paney'
Peterlumbo Hill
Port Augusta
Wilmington
Poochera
'Condada'
Iron Knob
Hwy
Upper Spencer Gulf MP
Augusta
Minnipa
Hwy
Pinkawillinie CP
Lake Gilles
Eyre Highway
Eyre Peninsula
Port Germein
Wudinna
Kyancutta
Koongawa
Kimba
Whyalla
Hwy
Mount Damper
Barna
Venus Bay
A1
Spencer Gulf
Port Pirie



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Telegraph poles show how properties used to communicate; Team NZ were here to break a world record; There is a plethora of holes, some of them massive

6. Flight Path – allow 4-5 hours: Honestly, this is my pick of the bunch. It has everything, with epic vistas, low-range driving, geologic wonders and did I say epic vistas? Throw in kangaroos, emus, and plenty of goats and I even spotted my favourite lizard, a thorny devil hiding in the crack of a rock.

Take your time on this drive, the track demands it. A high-clearance 4WD is required and being able to lock it into 4x4 is a must. Also, if rhyolite columns are as fascinating to you as they are to me, you'll get to see loads of them. The lookout offers 360-degree views across the Gawler Ranges and Peterlumbo Hill is a standout.

7. Horseshoe Loop – allow 3-4 hours: Another cracking drive with some tough challenges along the way. Some of the creek crossings are tough, with the first one safer with someone spotting you through the tight rocky corner and rock step. Stop often to enjoy the views or listen to the birds in the trees. Check out Red River where fast-running water has eroded the banks. A giant eagle's nest is spectacular, but please don't climb the tree.

You'll spot old telegraph lines alongside a section of the track and the handmade gidgee fence posts that are still standing. This is an outstanding drive through the hills with many stunning vistas.

LAST WORDS

Mount Ive Station was originally established as a pastoral lease in 1864 by Price Maurice and has been owned by Len and Joy Newton and their family since 2002. In that time, the Newtons have improved the station stay facilities immensely and the camping experience is wonderful. With access to Lake Gairdner and several station drives of varying difficulty, you can enjoy some quality time at Mount Ive Station.

TRAVEL PLANNER

REGION: Gawler Ranges, South Australia.

NEAREST TOWN: Port Augusta is located 196km west of Mount Ive Station.

WHEN TO GO: The cooler months from April to September are the best times, but access may close after rain.

ACCOMMODATION: Mount Ive Station provides powered, unpowered and bush camping sites, Shearers' Quarters (BYO bedding), stone rooms and a self-contained stone hut.

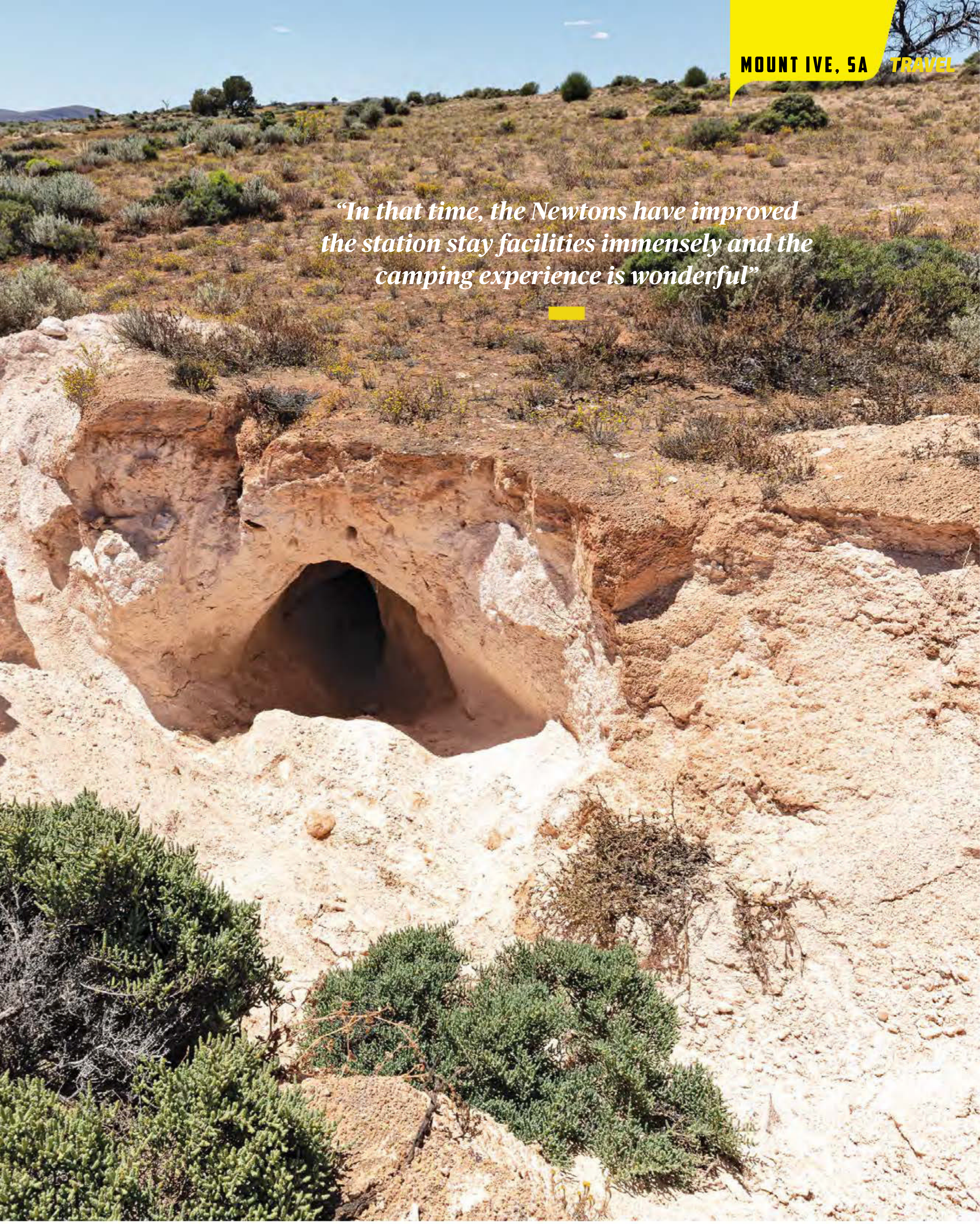
FACILITIES: Unleaded and diesel fuel, limited supplies at reception, bar, wi-fi, camp kitchen.

WHAT TO TAKE: Compressor and tyre gauge, tyre repair kit, first aid kit, firewood, food and water.

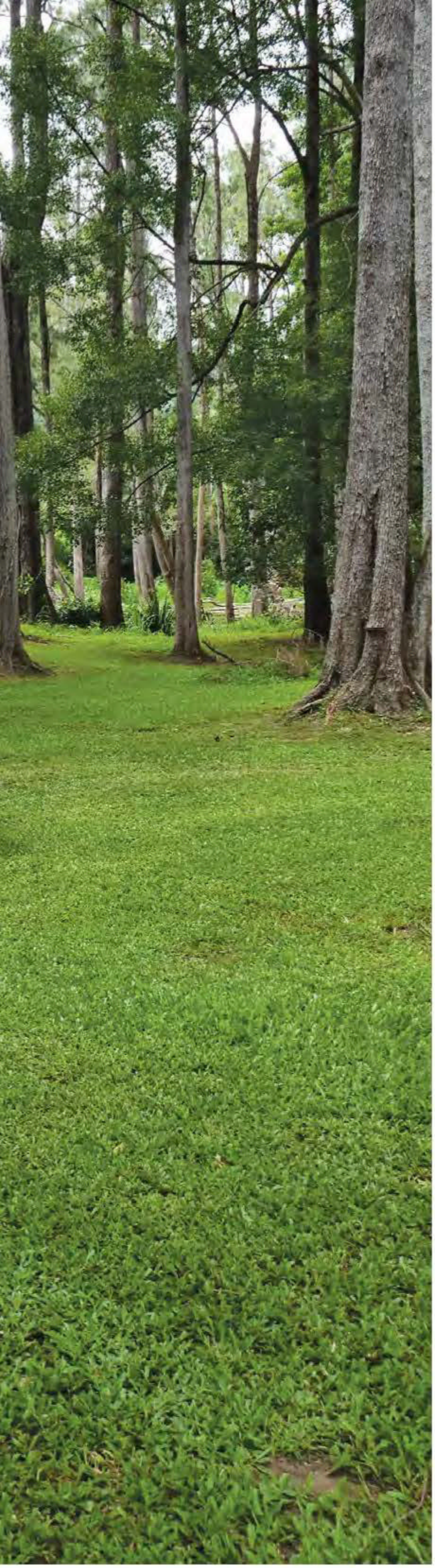
DIFFICULTY: Some of the self-drive tracks require high-clearance 4WDs and reduced tyre pressures. The road to Mount Ive and the track onto Lake Gairdner are suitable for all vehicles.

CONTACTS:
Mount Ive Station
W: mtive.com.au

South Australia road warnings
W: dit.sa.gov.au/OutbackRoads



"In that time, the Newtons have improved the station stay facilities immensely and the camping experience is wonderful"



IN BRIEF
- Retro-style 16ft couples van
- Lightweight for medium-size vehicles
- Can be optioned for off-grid travel

GOOD VIBRATIONS

Words and Pics
JOHN FORD

Goldy Caravans from the Gold Coast has tapped into a niche market for a compact and simple retro van.

When I saw the first Goldy caravan prototypes at the Brisbane Show in 2021, there were dozens of couples lined up to have a look. As more people approached, their faces immediately lit up with big smiles when they saw the two pastel-coloured vans on display. It took some a while to realise these weren't beautiful restorations. Instead, they were a modern take on a 60s Franklin with contemporary composite construction and a happy mix of stylish accessories.

Goldy founder Jamie Driver has long had a passion for old-school automobiles and had a career bringing classic cars back to life. This led to restoring a mix of early Millard, Franklin and Viscount vans for a couple of years before he realised that getting parts was time-consuming and increasingly expensive.

He began exploring the challenge of building new vans that looked old. The idea appealed because he had complete control of the process and the quality and durability of the finished product. After all, a 60s van will always be the original flimsy construction if the rebuild is genuinely authentic.

THE STRENGTH
COLLECTIVE

> “The wall and roof panels assembled on the chassis *are permanently bonded together to form a single entity*”

Goldy
CARAVANS

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Easily towed by smaller vehicles
- Beautiful finish and style
- Lots of windows for a light and airy feeling

CONS

- Minimal self-sufficiency as standard

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Building a new Goldy; Owner Jamie Driver now operates with a close-knit team of four; Inside the Burleigh Heads factory

Jamie's love of classic cars and 60s vans was born from the belief that the early designers had different values. It's easy to agree that the 50s and 60s gave birth to beautiful vehicles with a timeless appeal. It's the smooth-flowing curves of the Franklin on which the Goldy is based, combined with nostalgic colour combinations that stop people in their tracks. The van takes its name from the business location on the Gold Coast – or the Goldy as it's known to locals.

After making the two prototypes from his home, Jamie moved into a small factory to begin production. He has since moved again and now operates with a close-knit team of four with a plan to expand over the next few months. The current output is a van a week, but lead times are growing as with all builders.

ABOVE AND BELOW Inside the Burleigh Heads factory; Electric caravan mover

> “While it’s not an exact replica, *only a dedicated vintage van spotter would know the difference*”

THE BUILD

If you’ve ever seen the chassis of most original 60s vans, you’d be forgiven for wondering how many of them have lasted this long, because the C-section chassis is ultra-light compared to what we see today. The Goldy chassis is a much more robust design, produced locally from engineer-certified drawings from Australian 75mm x 50mm box section DuraGal steel. The chassis and underfloor are coated with a rubberised compound for added durability. The suspension is a single axle leaf spring system rated to 1600kg.

The body construction is also utterly modern. The old-school vans used a lightweight aluminium frame with a raised profile alloy cladding and the barest amount

LEFT Beautiful finish and style

of insulation. Instead, the Goldy uses the same composite panels found in refrigerated trucks and many modern mainstream caravans. The panels are locally sourced and are CNC cut to a similar but slightly larger shape as a 16ft Franklin Regent. While it's not an exact replica, only a dedicated vintage van spotter would know the difference.

The roof, too, is the same composite insulating material, but it needs special treatment to achieve the curved shape of the roofline. To allow it to bend, the roof panel has slots cut into the underside in a process that takes 12 hours on a CNC machine.

The review van has a form ply floor, but I'm told the company is moving to a Thermo-Lite 'Elephant Skin' composite that weighs less and has marine-grade resilience.

The wall and roof panels assembled on the chassis are permanently bonded together to form a single entity using high-quality German glue. A fibreglass skin then connects under the ceiling for a neat finish.

The furniture is made from PVC foamboard, as used in the boating industry, so it's durable, waterproof and has a contemporary look. Tasmanian Oak detailing completes the impressive interior design.

Windows are a Camec product that is uncannily close in looks to the original. But they have had the Goldy treatment to match the old-school theme. The team removes the rounded double-glazed acrylic and replaces it with flat clear panels, making it look true to style.

GOLDY 16FT
BEACH CRUISER

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Overall length 5.80m (19ft)
External body length 4.87m (16ft)
External body width 2.25m (7ft 4in)
Travel height 2.75m (9ft)
Internal height 2.06m (6ft 7in)
Tare 1100kg
ATM 1500kg
Payload 400kg
Ball weight 120kg

EXTERNAL

Structure Fibreglass Composite
Cladding Fibreglass
Chassis DuraGal® Custom Chassis
Suspension 7 leaf Eye to Eye Spring 1600kg
Coupling 2000kg Mechanical Override Coupling
Brakes LoadForce Disc Hubs and Brakes
Wheels Smoothie Rim, Dress Ring, Hubcap and White Wall tyres
Water 2 x 62L tanks (fresh/fresh or fresh/grey)
Battery 100Ah or 200Ah Lithium
Solar 350W Flexible Panels
Air-conditioner Ducted Reverse Cycle Truma Saphir
Gas No
Sway control Optional

INTERNAL

Cooking Portable induction cooktop
Fridge Retro custom Goldy fridge
Microwave Optional
Bathroom Optional — ensuite with portable toilet and fixed shower
Washing machine Optional — portable
Hot water Duoetto Mk2 or Aqueous Mk2

PRICE FROM $69,990

OPTIONS FITTED

Ensuite, Sirocco II fans, retro-style side awning, water tanks, pump and heater, 200Ah battery, solar panels, paint protection film and more

PRICE AS SHOWN $89,990

MORE INFORMATION

Goldy Caravans
P: (07) 5647 5655
E: jamie@goldycaravans.com
W: www.goldycaravans.com

AUTHENTIC LOOKS

I'm still looking for someone who doesn't think the van looks stunningly beautiful. The smooth composite walls are clad in a choice of four pastel colours that fit right in with the theme. White wall tyres and spats around the wheel arches add to the style, while the minimalist rear-end treatment sees big windows and retro style but bright LED lights. The spare sits on the A-frame where you might expect some gas bottles, but Jamie doesn't like the idea of gas in a van, so everything on board is electric. Winding down the corner steadies when camping is important, though. The van is light enough to push around on hard ground by hand, so you need the steadies to stop the whole thing tipping up when someone is inside.

THE LAYOUT

There's not much for the designer to play with in a 16ft van, so the layout in the review van is simple with a dinette at the front and an east-west bed at the back. In the middle is a kitchenette on the driver's side and an ensuite opposite.

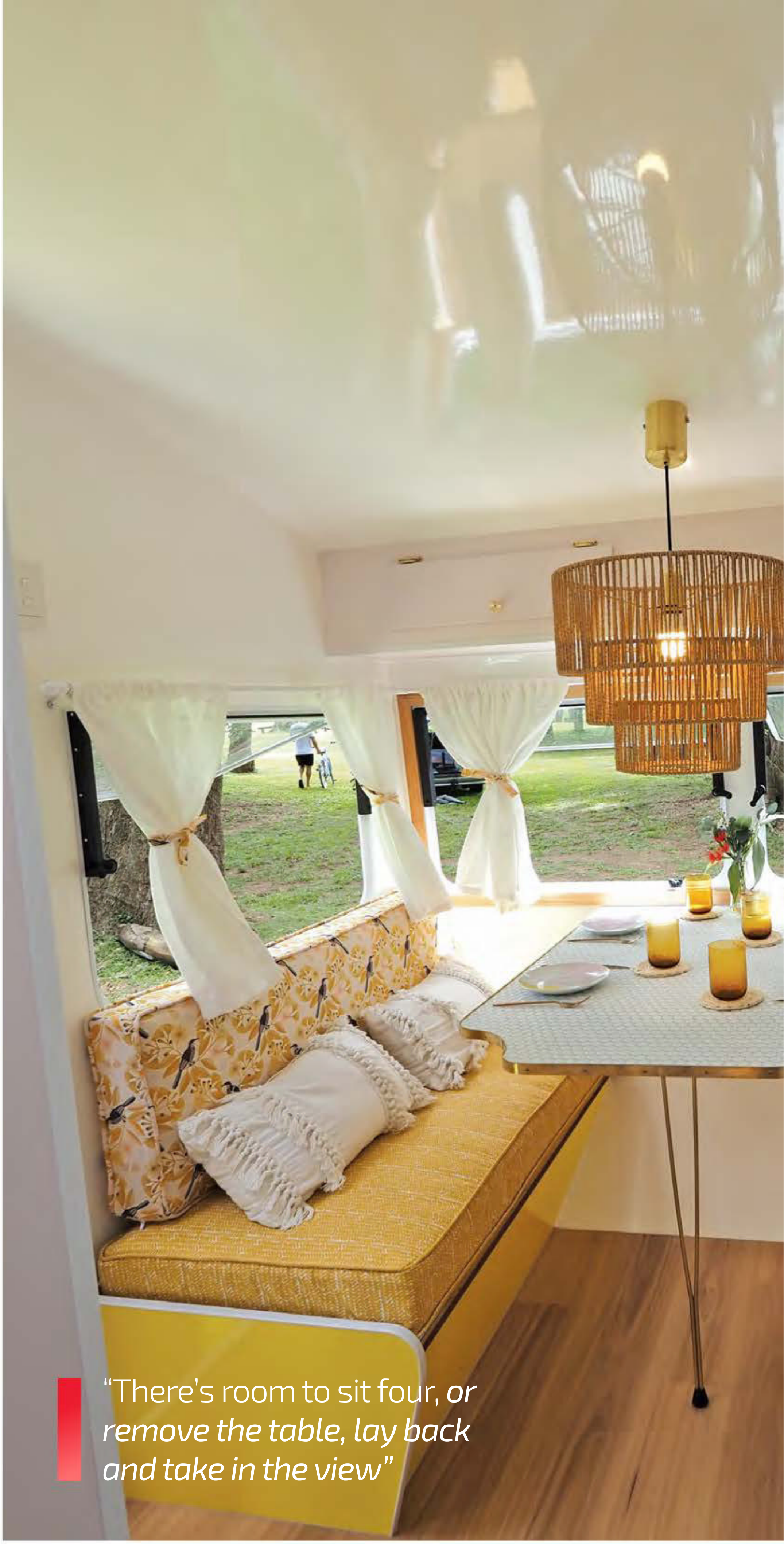
Considering the diminutive nature of the Goldy, there's a surprising feeling of roominess inside. Even more remarkable is that original 60s vans of this size didn't have an ensuite. Part of the spacious feeling is how the front and back walls balloon from the floor and flow over the ceiling. The high roof height at the centre of the van also helps here.

Anyone stepping aboard will be delighted with the size of the front dinette. There's room to sit four or remove the table, lay back and take in the view through the 180-degree panorama of oversized windows. Most photos in Goldy's promotional material show a van parked right on a beach, and many buyers will be enticed by the image.

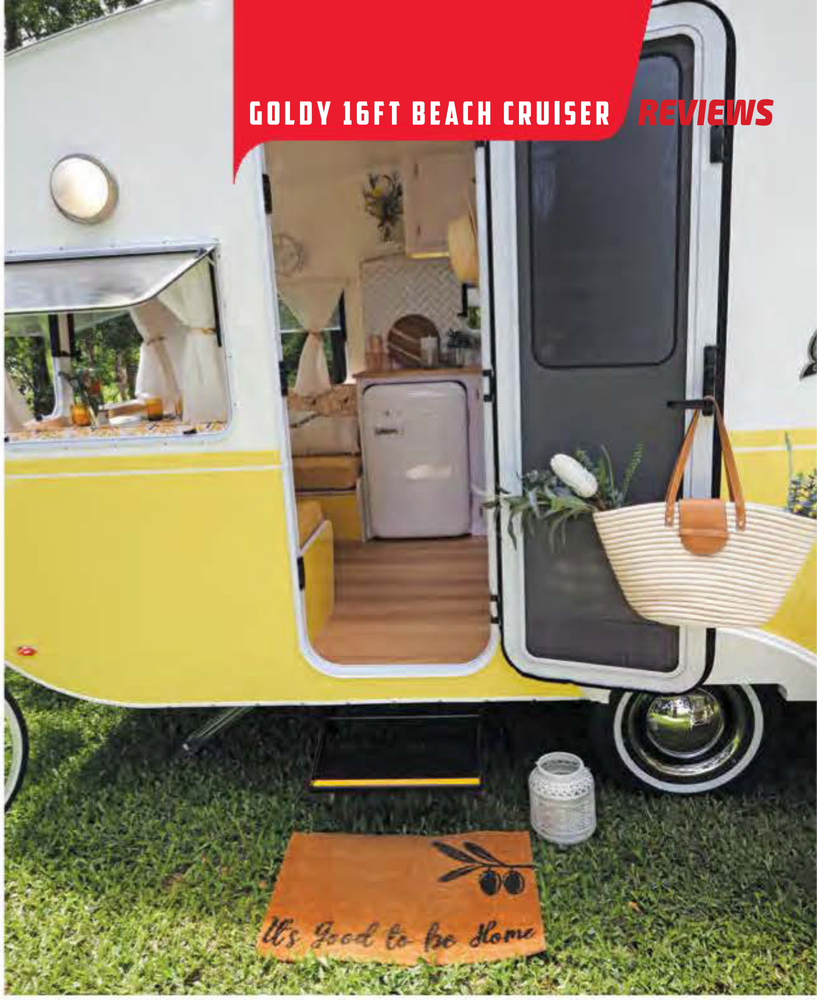
The table drops to make a 'nearly' double bed that younger family members would enjoy. As a day bed with the sun streaming in over winter, it's a perfect timeout hideaway.

In its standard form, the van is destined for caravan parks, so a basic 12V system runs lights and some USB points for charging. If you want to get away by yourself, option up to solar panels, lithium battery water tanks and an inverter.

The kitchen is simple. An art deco 240V fridge will keep drinks cool once you are hooked up to power in a caravan park, so if you're planning on free camping, bring an esky. The timber benchtop has a circular stainless-steel sink with a vintage-style mixer, room for a kettle and toaster and a portable induction cooktop, so think breakfast, cafe dining and outside barbecues rather than dinner parties. Bench and overhead cupboards can store your supplies, and there's more cupboard space over the bed and the dinette.



> "There's room to sit four, *or remove the table, lay back and take in the view"*


It's Good to be Home

LEFT AND ABOVE Anyone stepping aboard will be delighted by the size of the front dinette; There's a surprising feeling of roominess inside

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ABOVE AND RIGHT The ensuite comes optional in the Goldy; The dining table turns into extra bed for the kids, or sunbed for taking in the views

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
The Goldy is a niche van with lots of street style and a modern sturdy build. It compares well in price to some restoration projects and might have better durability

TOWABILITY
Easily towed by smaller vehicles, lightweight and good balance

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
Will mainly be used as a weekender and for caravan parks, fits the use perfectly

BUILD QUALITY
Looks stunning with a good attention to detail

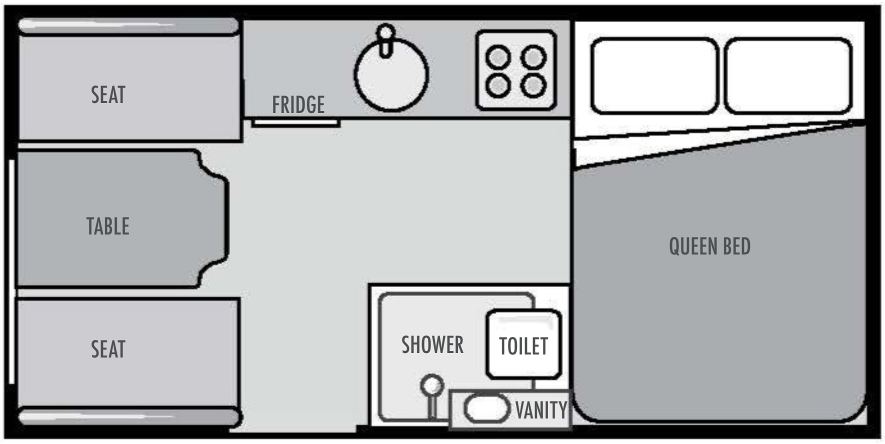
LIVEABILITY
For a 16ft van it has lots of room to move

SELF-SUFFICIENCY
Intended for short stays but can be optioned for longer touring

CUSTOMER CARE
Small company with personal attention to potential problem solving

INNOVATION
A fresh approach to old-school design

X-FACTOR
Attracts lots of happy smiles everywhere it goes



ABOVE AND BELOW The timber benchtop has a circular stainless-steel sink with a vintage-style mixer; Bench and overhead cupboards can store your supplies

The original Goldy concept envisaged a portable external shower room attached to the driver's side of the van. Feedback proved this was unpopular, and while it remains an option, the preferred choice has been an internal ensuite as on our review van. Those wanting a pared-back and cheaper alternative can go with the standard van with an ample storage cupboard instead and use the facilities in a caravan park. You will also add water tanks, a water heater and a pump for the ensuite. Either way, a portable toilet is provided.

THE DRIVE

The light weight of the van means existing owners tow with a diverse range of vehicles, including a short-wheelbase Jeep and a Mazda CX3, and there's a build coming up that will match to a '31 Ford Roadster. That should look something special!

> "While the portable external shower room remains an option, *the preferred choice has been an internal ensuite as on our review van*"

"*The price is fair for a handmade, boutique van* with classic styling and an air of exclusivity"

IT'S A WRAP

Our time with the Goldy felt like being on an Elvis beach movie set, and I half expected Ursula Andress to make an entrance. The Goldy is like that. It transports you to a simpler time when you didn't need a coffee maker or humidifier to have a fun weekend away. Price for *Caravan World* readers starts at $69,990 and a van loaded with options like an ensuite, solar, lithium and water tanks will be $89,990. That's fair for a handmade, boutique van with classic styling and an air of exclusivity. If it encourages you to take that all-important down time, then it's worth every cent.

The Goldy is ideal for couples' weekend escapes and can also be set up for the more adventurous. There's room to spread out for serious relaxing, and its light weight makes it easy to tow by an extensive range of smaller vehicles.

Goldy CARAVANS
GOLDY CARAVANS

ABOVE AND BELOW The Goldy transports you back to a simpler time; The smooth composite walls are clad in a choice of four pastel colours

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Even the most well-seasoned travellers need to sit down and plan out their next journey, considering everything from the season to the route you'll be travelling.

BORDER PROTECTION

***Words** Amelia Mansell **Pics** Supplied*

FRUIT FLY CONTROL
NO FRUIT ALLOWED ON RETURN TRIP
EXCEPT UNDER REGULATIONS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

One of the either ingrained or forgotten considerations for some travellers is the rules and regulations for carrying produce across state or territory borders throughout Australia. These rules and the specific items vary between and within states, and hefty fines can apply to those who break them. So, a quick refresh during your journey planning stage might save you a world of trouble in the long run.

I'm sure many of us can recall a family road trip or two that was brought to a halt when suddenly all the fresh fruit and produce your parents had been doling out in a responsible manner became an all-you-can-eat buffet. The 'waste not want not' mantra ruled with an iron first, because the idea of throwing the produce into the amnesty bins before crossing state lines was unthinkable.

Knowing what the rules are before you set out and how to find that information can save you from heavy on-the-spot fines or potentially causing a pest outbreak in protected areas.

Quarantine lines aren't always as simple as state or territory borders, with various additional biosecurity zones throughout Australia (for example, northern Queensland has two). These rules have been put in place to protect Australia's unique and fragile

QUARANTINE CHECKPOINT
WELCOME TO WESTERN AUSTRALIA
COMMERCIAL VEHICLES
WIDE & HIGH VEHICLES
STOP
TRAKMASTER
TANAMI
TS 77 DR
MILLARD
PROCEED TO STOP SIGN AND PREPARE FOR VEHICLE INSPECTION
CAR CARAVANS

environment and to ensure the livelihoods of agricultural growers are safeguarded, so it is everyone's obligation to ensure we act responsibly and plan accordingly.

CHECK BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

Before you hit the road or move to your next interstate location, remember to check any restrictions that might apply to your trip. The Australian Interstate Quarantine website (www.interstatequarantine.org.au) offers a helpful tool for travellers to use when planning their journey. The website allows you to enter your departure and arrival points and provides information on the different quarantine and biosecurity zones you will be crossing, what they are protecting and what items you can and cannot take with you across the border or zone.

LEFT TO RIGHT No fruit allowed on return trip; Quarantine checkpoint at WA/SA border; The small fruit fly can cause a lot of damage

The Vegie Patch
APPLES $2
PEARS $2
CARROTS $2
ONIONS $2
TOMATOES $3
BEETROOT $3
CUCUMBER $1
KALE $2 BUNCH
ZUCCHINI $1
CAPSICUMS 3 for $2
RHUBARB $3
EGGS DOZ $5
SILVERBEET $2
EGGPLANT $1
OTHER PRODUCE AS PER MARKED PRICE

AVOIDING UNINVITED HITCHHIKERS

Pests (such as the infamous fruit fly), diseases and weeds can be spread through movement of many items, including:

- Plant or plant products
- Fruit and vegetables
- Animals or animal products
- Soil
- Agricultural machinery/other equipment

The most pertinent to your average travellers, of course, is fruit and vegetables. The rules on these differ from state to territory. For example, South Australia does not allow any fruit or fruiting vegetables from anywhere in Australia except for Tasmania. So, check online to ensure you know exactly what you can or cannot take with you – particularly if you won't be passing through a quarantine centre and the responsibility to abide by the rules rests solely on you.

We must all do our bit to help minimise the risk of spreading these pests, diseases and weeds that can have a severe impact on Australia's beautiful and unique environment, as well as the agricultural community.

ABOVE AND BELOW Wait and buy fresh produce after you've crossed the state or territory border; Eat it or dump it

> "Whenever you reach a border with produce that can't be taken across, *you have a responsibility to eat it or bin it"*

QUARANTINE BIN
500 m

CHERRiES
back oF house

ABOVE AND RIGHT Waiting until you've crossed the border is a great way to ensure you try out the local produce; Keep an eye out for quarantine bin signs on the road

Some examples of the pests that might be trying to hitchhike a ride with you include the citrus red mite in NSW, phylloxera that lives in parts of NSW and Victoria and the tomato potato psyllid found near Perth.

The most notorious pest offender that tries to hitch a ride with travellers is the Queensland fruit fly, found in the east coast states and the NT but has not made its way to SA, WA or Tasmania. The Mediterranean fruit fly is another offender and is quarantined within WA.

Fruit flies are much smaller than your ordinary house fly and cannot travel very far, and as the name would suggest, infest fruit, and also vegetables. Infested fruit can look perfectly fine from the outside, but the inside often looks brown and mushy. Because of this, the public abiding by the rules plays a significant role in helping maintain the Fruit Fly Exclusion Zones (FFEZ) throughout Australia.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

NSW and ACT
NSW Department of Primary Industries
- P: 1800 680 244
- E: quarantine@dpi.nsw.gov.au
- W: dpi.nsw.gov.au

NT
Department of Primary Industry and Resources, Biosecurity & Product Integrity Division NT Quarantine
- P: (08) 8999 2118
- E: quarantine@nt.gov.au
- W: nt.gov.au

Qld
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Biosecurity Queensland
- P: 13 25 23
- E: info@daf.qld.gov.au
- W: daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/biosecurity

SA
Primary Industries and Regions Biosecurity SA – Plant Health
- P: (08) 8207 7820
- E: pirsa.planthealth@sa.gov.au
- W: pir.sa.gov.au

Tas
Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania
- P: (03) 6165 3777
- E: biosecurity.tasmania@nre.tas.gov.au
- W: nre.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/biosecurity

Vic
Agriculture Victoria
- P: 136 186
- E: plant.standards@ecodev.vic.gov.au
- W: agriculture.vic.gov.au/psb

WA
Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- P: (08) 9334 1800
- E: followup@dpird.wa.gov.au
- W: agric.wa.gov.au/quarantine

HOW TO DISPOSE OF YOUR PRODUCE

Often when preparing for a camping trip or holiday, stocking the pantry is a sign of forward-planning, especially if you have ravenous kids aboard. But if you're going to be crossing any borders early on, checking the rules and restrictions ahead of time will save you having to devour or dump all prohibited fruit and veg. But waiting to buy produce at your destination or along the way once you cross the border is a great way to sample regional produce.

Whenever you reach a border with produce that can't be taken across, you have a responsibility to eat it or bin it. Some interstate roads and quarantine zones do have inspection points where you can dispose of all prohibited items, but these do vary from state to state and not all areas have the amnesty bins to ensure the produce is responsibly disposed of to prevent the spread of pests and diseases.

Here are your options when there is no designated inspection point or amnesty bin:

1. Eat them before entering the state: if you are nearing the border and still have prohibited fruit and vegetables with you, consider consuming them before crossing the border.
2. Give them away: if you manage to bump into any travellers heading the opposite way, consider giving your produce to them to enjoy.
3. Bin them in a sealed bag: if you cannot consume or give away your produce, dispose of it in a sealed plastic bag and throw it in a bin. Make sure to seal the bag tightly to prevent any pests from escaping.
4. Check with local authorities: some local councils have specific rules and regulations for disposing of fruit and vegetables.

It's important to be aware of the quarantine rules and regulations when travelling between states and territories in Australia and to account for these restrictions in your initial journey planning. Carrying restricted items can have serious consequences for the environment and the agricultural industry. Travellers should always check the restrictions before moving to their next destination and dispose of restricted items responsibly. Remember, these rules are in place to protect Australia, and we all have a responsibility to do our part.

> "Carrying restricted items *can have serious consequences for the environment and the agricultural industry*"

Pest Free & Proud
Thank You for Stopping!
PLACE FRUIT IN BIN

ABOVE Queensland fruit fly is no joke, so obey the rules

WHAT'S ON

ABOVE AND RIGHT Views of Harbour lights installations, Vivid Sydney 2022 (Image Destination NSW); The Australian Standing Stones in Glen Innes, NSW (Image Destination NSW)

NSW/ACT

Australian Celtic Festival

4–7 May 2023

Held in Glen Innes, this unique festival celebrates different Celtic cultures each year — with 2023 serving as the Year of Scotland. Includes performers, dance, pipe bands, official ceremonies, street parade, Highland Games, re-enactments, children's entertainment and activities, Celtic Cultural Awards and much more. Head online for more information: www.australiancelticfestival.com.

Firelight Festival and Firewalk

14–21 May 2023

Singleton's historic Dunolly Bridge and Cook Park precinct will be brought to life with a series of immersive displays of laser lights and projections that showcase the story of Singleton, engaging visitors in an unforgettable sensory experience. A must-see spectacular nightly from 14 to 22 May 2023. This event is ticketed but free. Visit www.nsw.gov.au/visiting-and-exploring-nsw/nsw-events/firelight-festival-and-firewalk and book yours today.

Vivid Sydney

26 May to 17 June 2023

Vivid Sydney is an annual creative festival that showcases the soul of the city, in collaboration with the most brilliant and boundary-pushing artists, thinkers and musicians of our time. Entry is free, and all are welcome to enjoy the art displays and 3D light projections with exhilarating live music performances, thought-provoking debates and deep-dive discussions from some of the world's brightest minds. To find out more: www.australias.guide/nsw/event/vivid-sydney-2023.

NT

Karrimanjbekkan An-me Kakadu: Taste of Kakadu

13–21 May 2023

Karrimanjbekkan An-me Kakadu: Taste of Kakadu returns in 2023 with a mouth-watering native-infused food program set to immerse visitors in a stimulating journey of senses, including traditional ground oven feasts, forage walks with Traditional Owners, canapé cruises and workshops. To find out more: www.parksaustralia.gov.au/kakadu/taste.

Alice Springs Longest Desert Lunch

20 May 2023

The Alice Springs Longest Desert Lunch takes pride of place as the premier food and wine event in Central Australia. Enjoy this dining extravaganza, supporting the ongoing operation and growth of the Hamilton Downs Youth Camp, a not-for-profit community organisation. Head online to learn more: www.hamiltondownsyouthcamp.org.

QLD

Road to Rodeo Mount Isa

7 May 2023

Help Mount Isa celebrate its 100th anniversary this year at the Road to Rodeo Mount Isa festival. Enjoy rodeo events including the bull ride, bareback bronc ride, steer wrestling, not to mention the crowd favourite — the op-shop barrel race. The Rodeo Rock concert will be headlined by Australian artist and Cold Chisel member, Ian Moss, as well as Shannon Noll and Mount Isa favourite Luke Geiger. Tickets are just $25 per adult, with 17 and under free. Book now: www.isarodeo.com.au/road-to-rodeo-mount-isa.

Sweet Days, Hot Nights Festival

26–27 May 2023

Head over to the Burdekin region, an easy hour's drive south of Townsville, for the Sweet Days, Hot Nights Festival at Home Hill Showgrounds, ideal for all ages. Come on Friday for the Burdekin Cultural Fair featuring the First Fire of the crushing season (celebrating the Burdekin region as one of the last areas to still burn sugar cane before harvesting). Saturday is action-packed with the Australian Hand Cane Cutting Championship. Head online to find out more: www.sweetdayshotnights.com.au.

SA

The Bubbles Festival Adelaide

19–20 May 2023

Back by popular demand, this festival celebrates all things sparkling. Meet wine producers and enjoy tastings at this stylish event. Tickets are on sale and must be bought ahead of time, and include more than just entry! Book online now: www.thebubblesreview.com/the-bubbles-festival.

Clare Valley SCA Gourmet Week

19–28 May 2023

Held in the Clare Valley, the SCA Gourmet Week consists of three different events: the Festival Weekend (19–21 May) which is packed with winery experiences; Breathe It In (22–26 May) which offers a fully immersive Clare Valley experience; and Land of the Long Lunch (27–28 May) where you can choose lunch events from the range of favourite restaurants or unique locations throughout the Clare Valley. The full program will launch online on 19 March 2023: www.clarevalleygourmet.com.au.

TAS

Australian Musical Theatre Festival

17–21 May 2023

Held in Launceston, the Australian Musical Theatre Festival is an unparalleled opportunity for musical theatre lovers, makers and industry professionals to get together, share and celebrate this wonderful genre. A full program and tickets are available online: www.amtf.org.au.

VIC

Grampians Grape Escape

5–7 May 2023

The iconic wine, food and music festival Grampians Grape Escape is returning to Western Victoria this May and will be celebrating its 30th year as one of the region's most highly anticipated festivals. For more information or to purchase tickets, head online: www.grampiansgrapeescape.com.au.

The Great Trentham Spudfest

6 May 2023

To be held on Saturday, 6 May, The Great Trentham Spudfest honours the humble spud with a day-long celebration of all-things potato. Enjoy local produce, live music, artists and plenty to keep the kids entertained. It will truly be a feast for the senses. Boil them, mash them, stick them in a stew — who doesn't love a good potato? Find out more online: www.trenthamspudfest.org.au.

WA

Taste Great Southern

4–14 May 2023

Escape the ordinary and head down to the festival celebrating fresh local food, boutique wines and the amazing flavours of the Great Southern. The festival will be home to long lunches, unique dinners, degustations, premium pairing events, community markets, music events, wine sessions and more. Book online now: www.wineandfood.com.au/taste-great-southern/events.

Exploring the Mount Ive Station tracks, Gawler Ranges, SA

Photographer: **GLENN MARSHALL**
Camera: **CANON EOS 6D MARK II**
F-stop: **F/16**
ISO: **400**

Quick Pitch
www.4wdAdventureOz.com
ADVOZ · 1
VICTORIA
CAMP COVER

BREAK WITH TRADITION

Words Anji Bignell
Pics Supplied

In honour of the Anzacs, we put a fancy spin on a great Aussie cook-up!

BACON AND EGG CUPS

TOTAL TIME: 30 minutes
SERVES: 6

INGREDIENTS

- 12 bacon strips
- 12 free range eggs
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Chopped chives

METHOD

Pre-cook bacon strips on the frying pan with some olive oil, just until partially cooked but not crisp.

Set bacon aside on paper towels.

Use an old muffin tray and grease each cavity with the bacon grease.

Wrap a bacon strip around the edge of each muffin cup, crack an egg in each hole and season with salt and pepper.

Place the muffin tray over a grill or cooking plate over the fire and cook until bacon is crisp and the eggs are firm.

Sprinkle each cup with chopped chives and serve.

CAMP OVEN MAPLE ROASTED LAMB

TOTAL TIME: 1 hr 40 mins
SERVES: 6

INGREDIENTS

- 1.5kg leg of lamb
- 5 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp lime juice
- 2 cloves of garlic, crushed
- 2cm piece of ginger, finely grated
- 3 tsp smoked paprika
- 4 tbsp maple syrup
- Salt and pepper, to taste

METHOD

Preheat your camp oven with the lid on, on top of a hot fire until there are hot coals.

Whisk together oil, lime juice, garlic, ginger, paprika and maple syrup in a small bowl. Season to taste.

Place lamb in your camp oven and brush with maple and honey mixture. Roast for 1.5 hours or until medium rare.

Rest for 10 minutes before serving with vegetables.

DAMPER SCONES

TOTAL TIME: 45 minutes
SERVES: 6

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups self-raising flour
- Pinch of salt
- 80g butter, chilled
- ¼ cup sultanas
- ¾ cup water

METHOD

Combine the flour, salt and butter in a bowl and mix together with your fingertips until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs, then mix in the sultanas.

Slowly add half the water to the dry mixture and combine well. Add the rest of the water and make into a dough (add more flour if it is too wet and sticky).

Turn the dough onto a floured board and knead into a round shape.

Cut into six equal pieces, dust with flour and roll into balls.

Place a trivet in the camp oven and add some grease proof paper on top of the trivet.

Place scones on the paper and place the lid on the camp oven over medium-high heat for around 30 minutes, checking with a skewer.

Serve with jam and cream.

GREEN ISLAND, QLD

For those who appreciate history, natural beauty and underwater wonders, Green Island off Cairns is the ideal place for a day visit or extended stay.

Word **ROBYN PITMAN-WILLIAMS**
Pics **TRACEY MCKENZIE AND SUPPLIED**

The Great Barrier Reef is undoubtedly one of Australia's brightest jewels. The beauty of the reef, the variety of region-exclusive corals and vibrant marine creatures lures international and domestic tourists to the island's shores every year. So, in a region with so many wonders, what makes the 30-acre island so unique?

First, it has a vast and interesting history, beginning at least 6000 years ago when the currents' buildup of sand and coral rubble settled on the platform reef to create an intricate ecosystem. In 1770, Captain James Cook first noticed the island while sailing by, naming it after Charles Green, the chief observer and astronomer on his vessel.

The island's pristine environment was recognised in 1937, when it was given the status of a national park. In 1981, it became part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

Known as Wunyam to the Indigenous

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The unparalleled beauty of Green Island; Cassius the croc (Image Green Island Resort); Take a ride on the glass-bottomed boat; The island is a short ferry ride from Cairns; Take a stroll through the grounds of Green Island (Image Tracey McKenzie)

Traditional Owners of the land, the Gungandi people, pre-British settlement Green Island was used as an initiation ground for young men.

The buff-banded rail is prominent on the island. While they are usually shy birds, members of the species on Green Island have become bold, almost aggressive, in their battle to snare leftover chips from tourists. These birds are apparently fearful of no one. In an attempt to curb their audacious behaviour, the island has requested that visitors not feed the birds. Also, fake snakes have been placed around Green Island to deter the bold little creatures, but if my experience is anything to go by, these attempts are failing dismally!

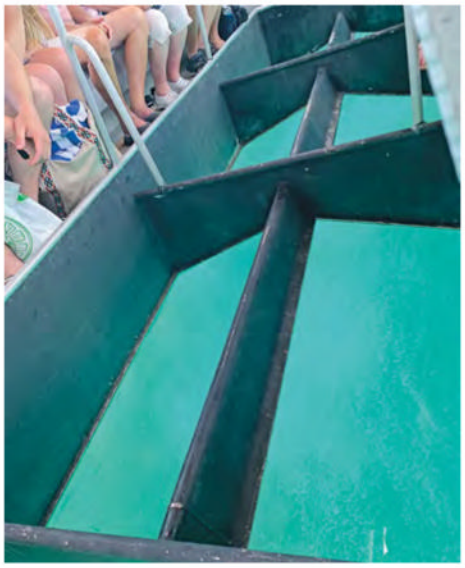
Snorkelling is a popular activity on the island, however, it does come with some restrictions and dangers. The island is highly protective of the natural environment and snorkellers are urged to avoid stepping on coral. During stinger season (October to May), swimmers are urged to don stinger suits to avoid painful stings and injury. For just $10, stinger suit rental from the Green Island surf shop is highly recommended.

In addition to soaking up the island's natural beauty and swimming in its crystal-clear waters, you can also visit Green Island's Marineland Melanesia Crocodile Park, home to aquariums of unique species of fish, such as the striped puffer fish and the deadly stonefish. You can also see turtles, Epaulette sharks and painted crayfish, and of course, there are the eponymous crocodiles, Cassius (see insert), Bulla, Bronto and Whitey.

With its strong Indigenous history and unique ecosystem, it is a region that is well worth the $233 family (or $94 per adult, $45 per child) cost of a ferry ride.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Green Island Reef Tours
P: (07) 4231 4007
E: info@greenisland.com.au
W: greenisland.com.au



CASSIUS THE CROCODILE

The most famous resident of the Green Island Resort is Cassius the crocodile. At 5.48 metres (18ft), he is the largest crocodile in captivity in the world and is recognised by the Guinness Book of World Records. Cassius's age is unknown, but he was captured in 1984 after he became a menace to boats in the Northern Territory's Finniss River. You can visit Cassius and his buddies at the Marineland Melanesia Crocodile Habitat on Green Island.

Cassius's brave handlers state that the huge reptile is an example of the sizes crocodiles can grow to in the wild. "The sheer size and power of Cassius and his other crocodile mates on display at Marineland are often a great reminder to be croc-wise in the croc country."

Words and Pics *John Hughes*

HOW TO FIT A WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION HITCH

Our friends at the RV Repair Centre step us through the overview of fitting a Hayman Reece weight distribution hitch.

A weight distribution hitch (WDH) is a potential solution for a tow vehicle that is experiencing handling problems associated with a 'light front end'. A heavy load imparted by the caravan on the rear of the tow vehicle will cause the rear to lower. It will also cause the front of the car to lift as the car chassis pivots around the rear axle. The result is less downforce being imparted on the tow vehicle's front tyres, reducing their contact patch with the ground. This can cause less precise steering and diminished braking performance. It will also set up altered dynamics, with the car and van more likely to pitch up and down. Another side effect can be your headlights pointing up, shining into oncoming traffic rather than directing at the road.

A WDH shifts some of the load imparted by the caravan off the rear axle and back onto the front axle. A correctly rated and fitted WDH can return the car to sit in a level position. The important thing, however, is that the returned load to the front axle means you have restored the front tyre contact patch for improved steering and braking. Restoring the balance between the front and rear loads can also stabilise the bouncing effect described above. Plus, your headlights should now be pointing where they are supposed to.

In principle, WDHs use levers to put upward force on the tow bar. This causes the chassis to rotate around the rear axle, lifting the rear of the car (reducing the load on the rear axle) and lowering the front of the car (increasing the load on the front axle). This is achieved by part of the load being lifted off the rear of the car now hanging off the A-frame.

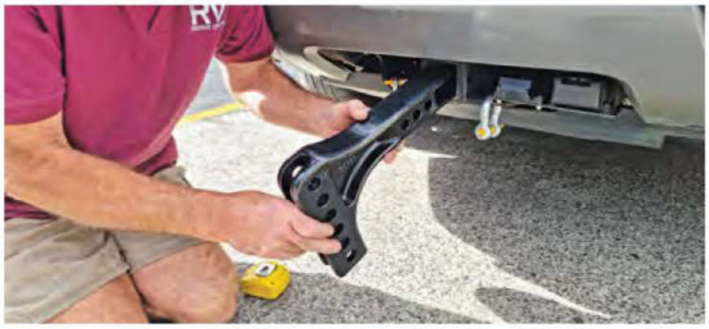
Our friends at the RV Repair Centre step us through the overview of fitting a Hayman Reece WDH. This should only be treated as an incomplete guide and the detailed instructions provided by Hayman Reece, including safety information, should be carefully followed. WDHs involve springs under high tension and should be treated with extreme caution at all times.

PREPARATION

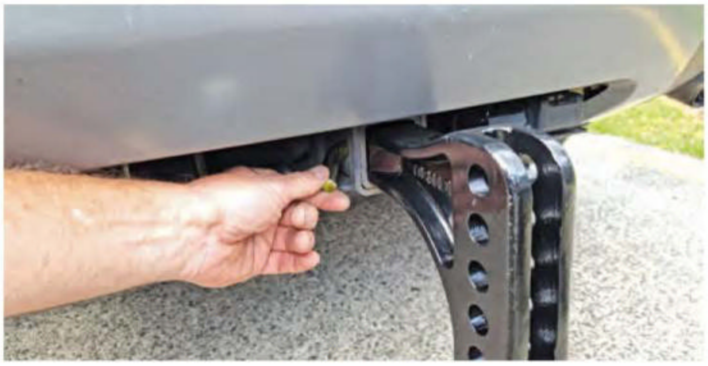
The front and rear ride height of the tow vehicle unhitched is used as a benchmark for achieving a level ride once the WDH is fitted. The van should also sit level once the WDH is fitted. Therefore, the following preparation is required:

- Load the tow vehicle and caravan as they would be for normal travel.
- Position the tow vehicle and caravan aligned in a straight line on flat even ground with at least 3 metres of clear area in front of the vehicle.
- Unhitch the caravan from the tow vehicle.
- Use the jockey wheel to level the caravan. Measure and record a point at the front and rear of the van on a common plane.
- Measure and record the height from the ground to the underside of the coupling.
- Measure and record the front and rear vehicle height from the ground up to the wheel arches.

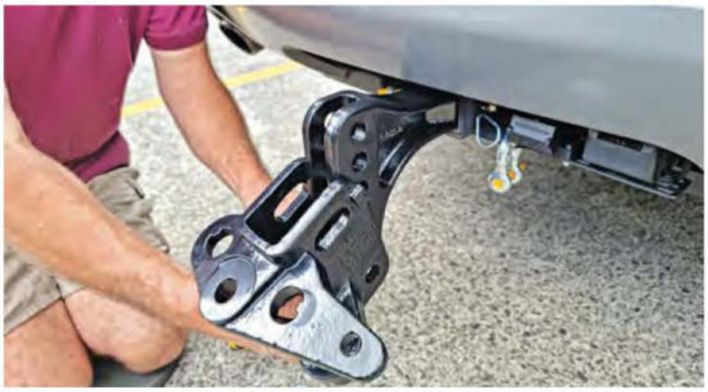
DROP SHANK AND WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION HEAD ASSEMBLY



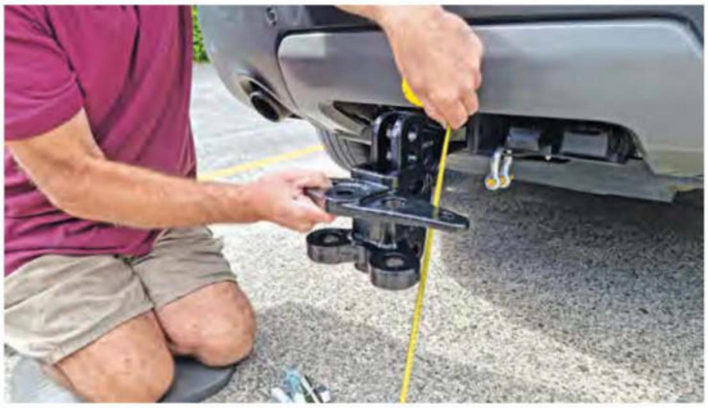
STEP 1 Insert the adjustable drop shank into the hitch receiver on the tow vehicle



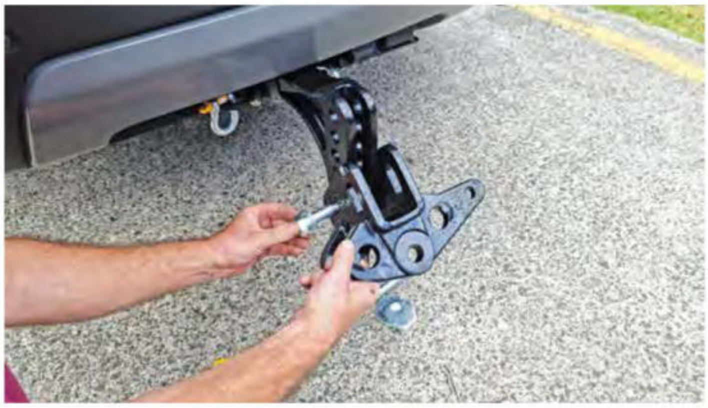
STEP 2 Secure the drop shank with the receiver pin



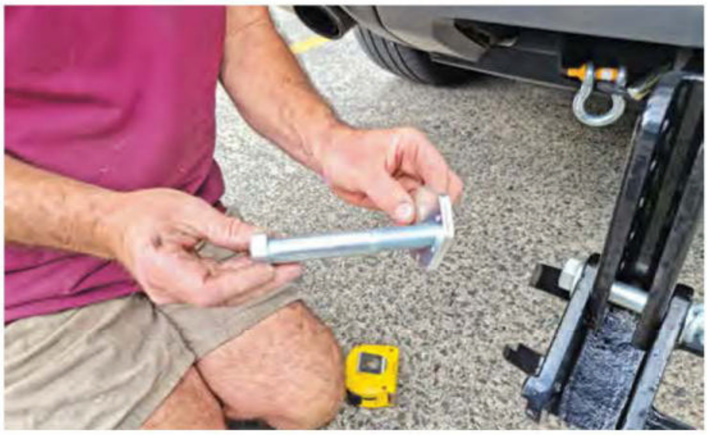
STEP 3 Slide the ball mount head over the shank



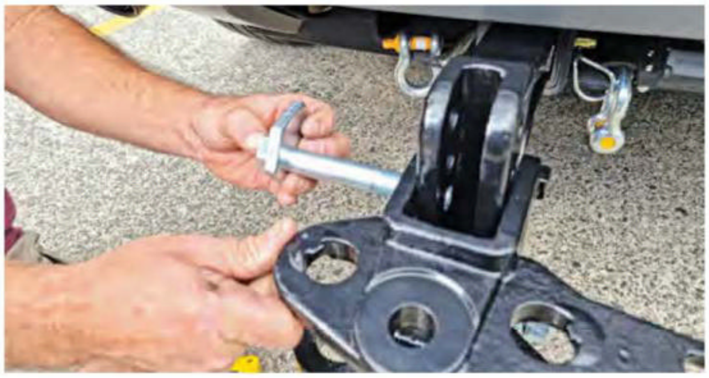
STEP 4 Position to achieve the same coupling height recorded



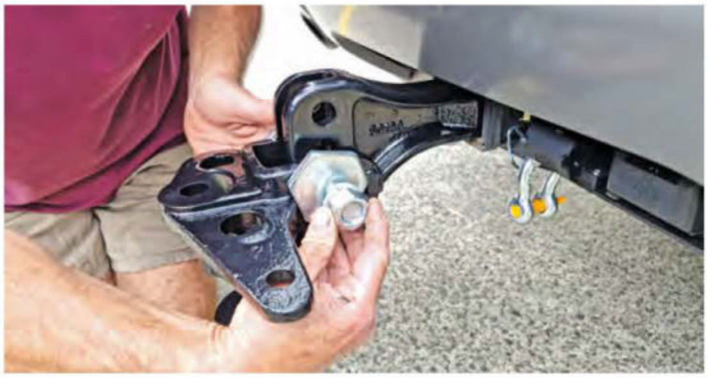
STEP 5 Insert the 115mm long bottom bolt in the nearest hole and fit the spring washer and nut



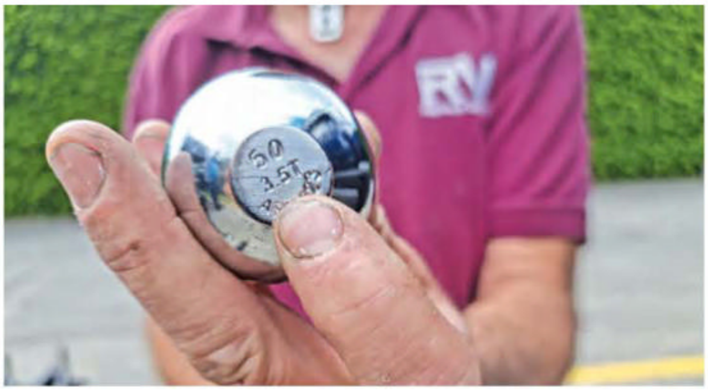
STEP 6 Insert the 127mm top bolt into one of the cams against the bolt head



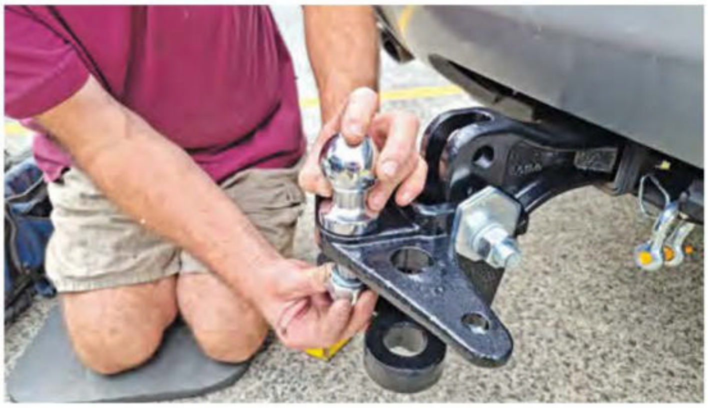
STEP 7 Slide the 127mm top bolt through the ball mount head and the shank, orienting the cam so the top plate is horizontal



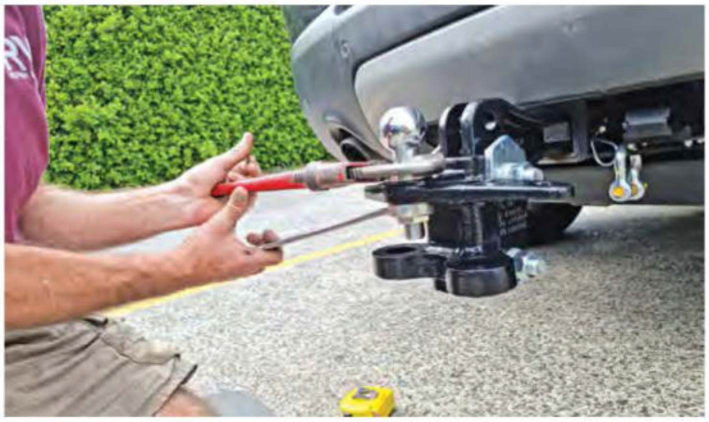
STEP 8 Attach the second cam with the same orientation and fit the spring washer and nut on the other side



STEP 9 Ensure the towball is correctly rated for your application

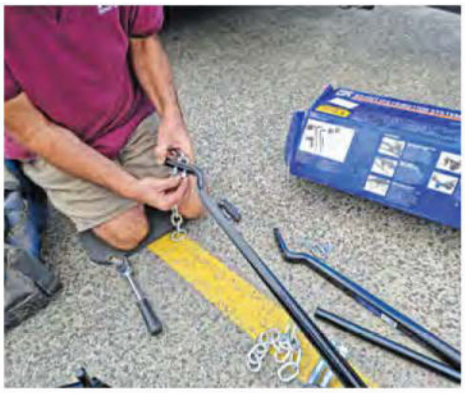


STEP 10 Fit the towball to the top plate of the weight distribution head with the spring washer and nut

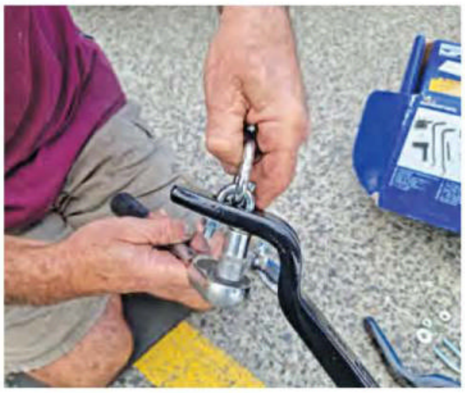


STEP 11 Tighten the towball nut

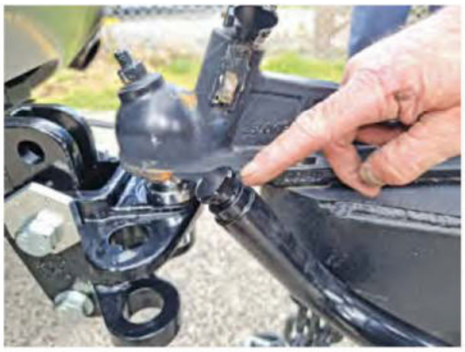
SPRING BAR AND SNAP UP BRACKET ASSEMBLY



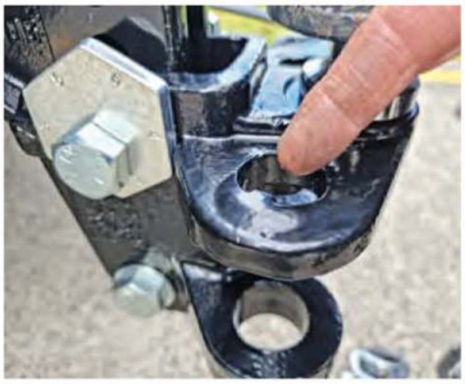
STEP 1 Attach the chain to each spring bar using the ‘U’ bolts and locking nuts



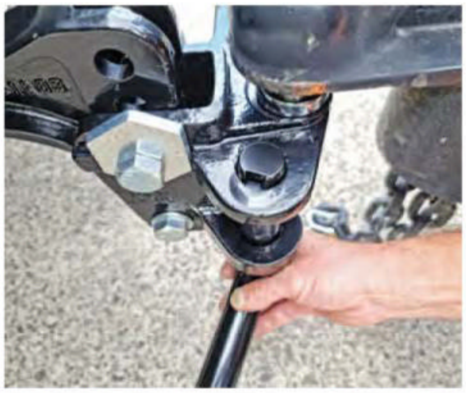
STEP 2 Tighten the locking nuts evenly until there is a minimum of 5mm thread exposed and the chain can still pivot freely in all directions



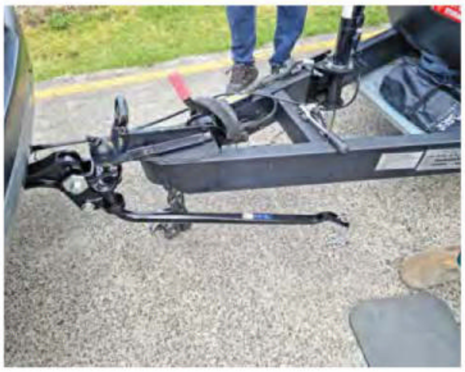
STEP 3 The spring bar is ‘keyed’ to engage into the weight distribution head



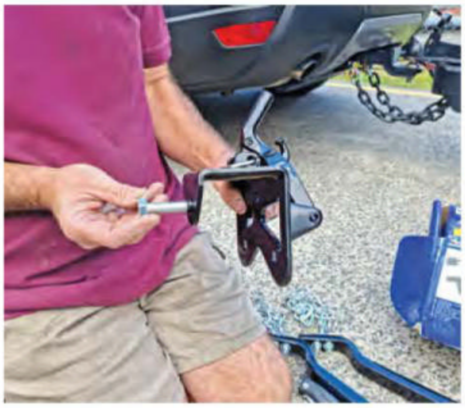
STEP 4 Note the notch in the weight distribution head



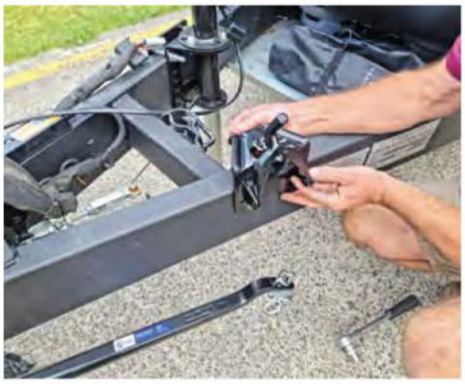
STEP 5 With the van coupled to the tow vehicle, insert the spring bar at right angles to the tow vehicle



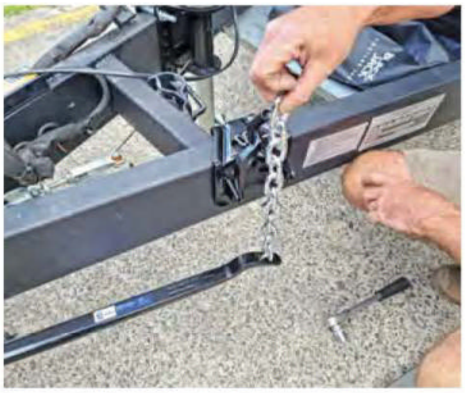
STEP 6 Pivot the spring bar to run parallel to the A-frame



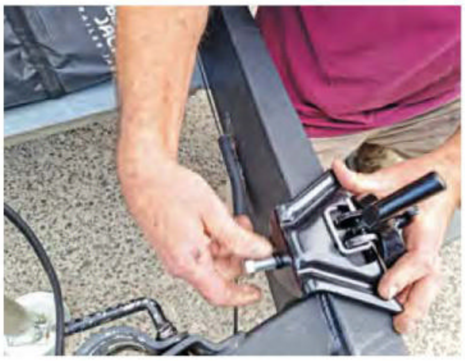
STEP 7 Fit the set screw to the snap up bracket



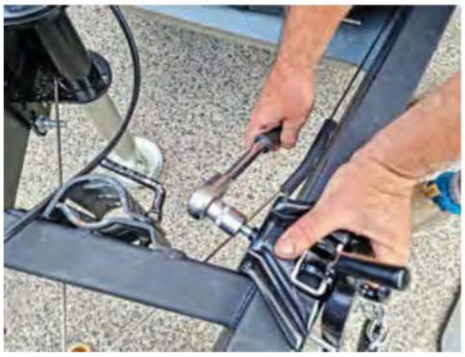
STEP 8 Place the snap up bracket on the A-frame



STEP 9 Position the snap up bracket so that the chain will hang vertically when connected



STEP 10 Finger-tighten the set screw against the inside of the A-frame

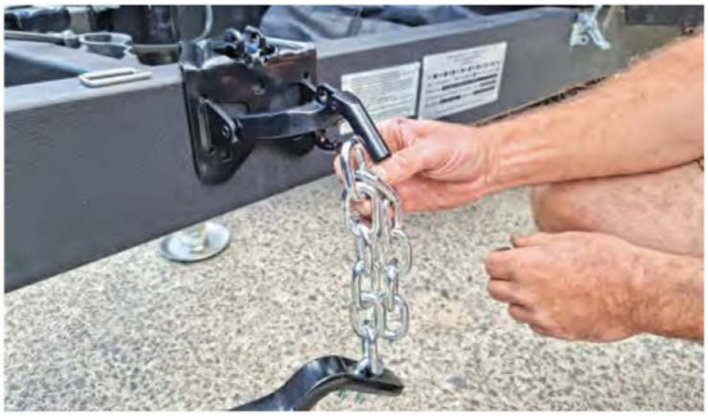


STEP 11 Then tighten a further full turn

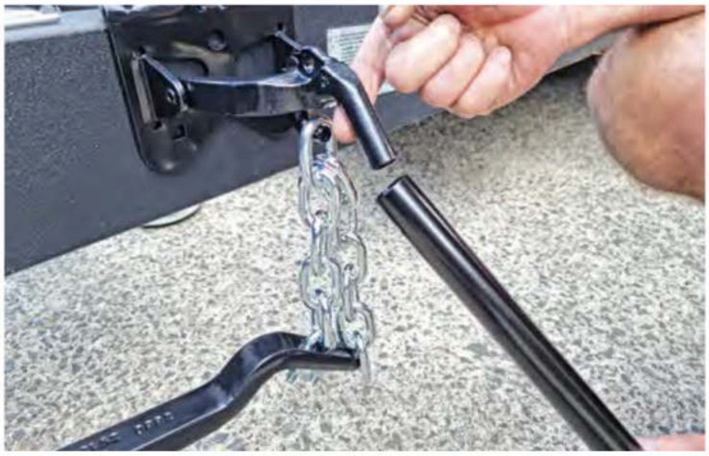
STEP 12 Repeat the process for the second spring bar and snap up bracket

CONNECTING SPRING BARS TO SNAP UP BRACKET

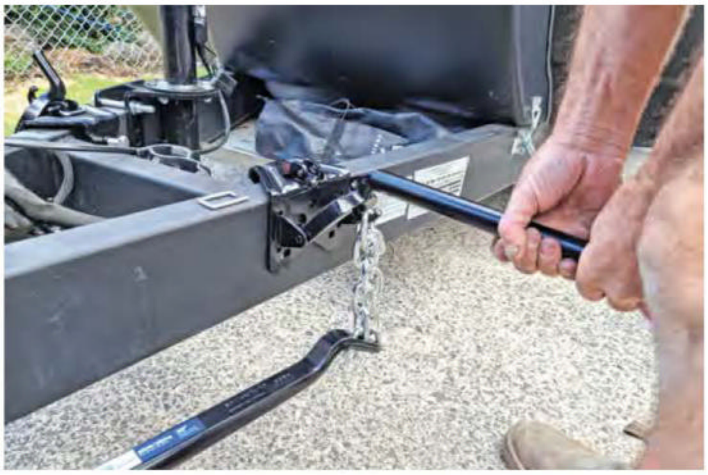
Use the jockey wheel to raise the coupling until the caravan is roughly level or slightly above.



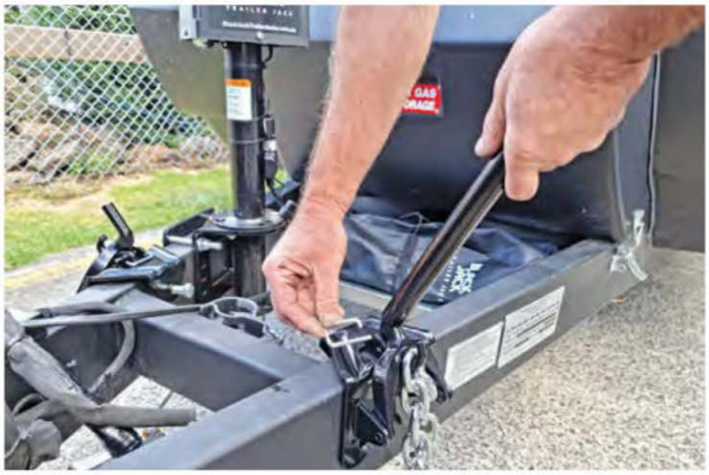
STEP 1 Position the snap bracket pivoting arm level to the ground, hold the chain vertically and connect the nearest chain link onto the pivoting arm hook



STEP 2 Slide the lifting handle over the end of the pivoting arm



STEP 3 Raise the handle to allow the pivoting arm to go over centre



STEP 4 Hold the lifting handle under tension until the safety pin is fully in place

ADJUSTMENT AND FINE TUNING

- Raise the jockey wheel so all of the van's front load is now sitting on the coupling.
- Remeasure the front and rear tow vehicle height from the ground up to the wheel arches.
- Compare these measurements against the original 'uncoupled' measurements.
- Ideally, the tow vehicle front and rear ride heights should have lowered by equal amounts (around 15mm).
- Remeasure the front and rear of the van to check for a level ride.
- Raising the tow vehicle front can be achieved by:
  - Lengthening the chain
  - Or if there are not enough links available, adjusting the cams to change the angle of the towball towards the vehicle
- Raising the tow vehicle rear can be achieved by:
  - Shortening the chain*
  - If the chain can't be shortened (as per below), adjust the cams to change the angle of the towball away from the vehicle

*A minimum of four working links is required (working links do not include those attached to the U bolt or snap up bracket)

- If the above tuning does not level the tow vehicle, more macro adjustments can be achieved by readjustment of the ball mount head.

IF IN DOUBT, CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL

Improper maintenance can lead to injury, death or property damage. Maintenance work of this nature should only be undertaken by people with suitable competence. Information provided is general in nature, not comprehensive, and should only be taken as a guide. Individual discretion must be exercised and persons undertaking described tasks do so completely at their own risk. Publishers and creators of this content accept no responsibility for loss or damage.

Thanks to Andrew Phillips and the team from the RV Repair Centre, 120 Canterbury Rd, Bayswater Nth Vic 3151, P: (03) 9761 4189.

BMPRO RELEASES NEW DC-DC CHARGER RANGE

***Words** John Ford*

Leading RV power management leader BMPRO recently released its new ProBoost range of DC-DC chargers, tested to perform in Australia's harshest climates. "When developing ProBoost, BMPRO set out to launch a rugged, robust and versatile DC-DC charging solution for a dual battery setup in your 4x4, SUV or ute that also allowed flexible installation for any type of adventure," said Brad Hooper, BMPRO marketing manager.

"The result is a product finely engineered and tested to ensure your battery is charged up and your 12V DC accessories are ready to go on arrival – whether that be your camping fridge keeping your drinks cold or your 12V lighting ready for the first night at camp," Brad continued.

ProBoost is ideal for adventurers of all types, allowing you to use your devices when parked without interfering with the vehicle's main battery, and also charging a second battery for even longer offroad adventures.

Durability is front and centre with the ProBoost range, and it is suitable for engine bay installations as well as in the vehicle canopy or cabin. It can withstand fully sealed, potted and rugged roads, not to mention heat, dust, mud and the vibration of corrugated roads.

ProBoost is compatible with all common battery chemistries including lithium LiFePO4 and lead acid. The high-power density design of this innovation provides charging efficiencies of up to 95%. The battery chemistry can be changed at the touch of a button.

If running on solar, ProBoost blends both the solar and auxiliary inputs of a vehicle together simultaneously to ensure there is always a consistent charge to the secondary battery. It includes a full in-built MPPT solar regulator to maximise solar input.

ProBoost is suitable for both standard and smart vehicle alternators and a range of protective features are built into the charger such as overtemperature, overvoltage and undervoltage protection to guard the battery's charging capacity. This new range complements BMPRO's existing MiniBoost range of 12V DC-DC chargers which are specifically designed to work with BMPRO's battery management systems.

For more information head online: www.teambmpro.com.

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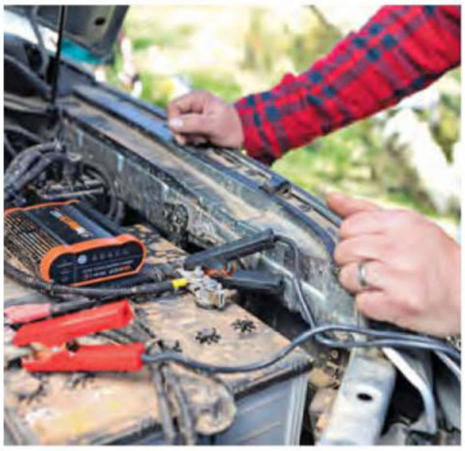

SOLID GPS TRACKER

***Words** John Ford*

SOLID GPS
QUICK START GUIDE
SOLIDGPS.COM/SUPPORT
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SOLID GPS

None of us wants to lose our valuables, and it can be a worry, especially on the road, that somebody might steal things. The Solid GPS tracker is an Australian-made product and developed by a young Melbourne-based group of innovators. Small enough to easily conceal, it will track its location anywhere it can receive a Telstra signal – so hide it in your van, boat or vehicle. I have one in my camera bag, which can easily be mistaken for a spare battery. A very handy feature is that you can track the location of the GPS and whatever it is hidden in on google maps as it travels.

When your vehicle moves, your tracker will detect that movement and update your vehicle's location every 2-5 minutes.

Solid GPS has just released a new model tracker with a 12-month battery life. Measuring about the size of a cigarette packet – remember them – the black body is discreet and can be placed anywhere to receive a signal.

Subscription to the tracking service is $6.99 a month or $69.99 a year and you can hook up with a 31-day free trial.

The new model increases the range to three depending on battery size. They start at $157, and the latest version is $247. Order through www.solidgps.com.

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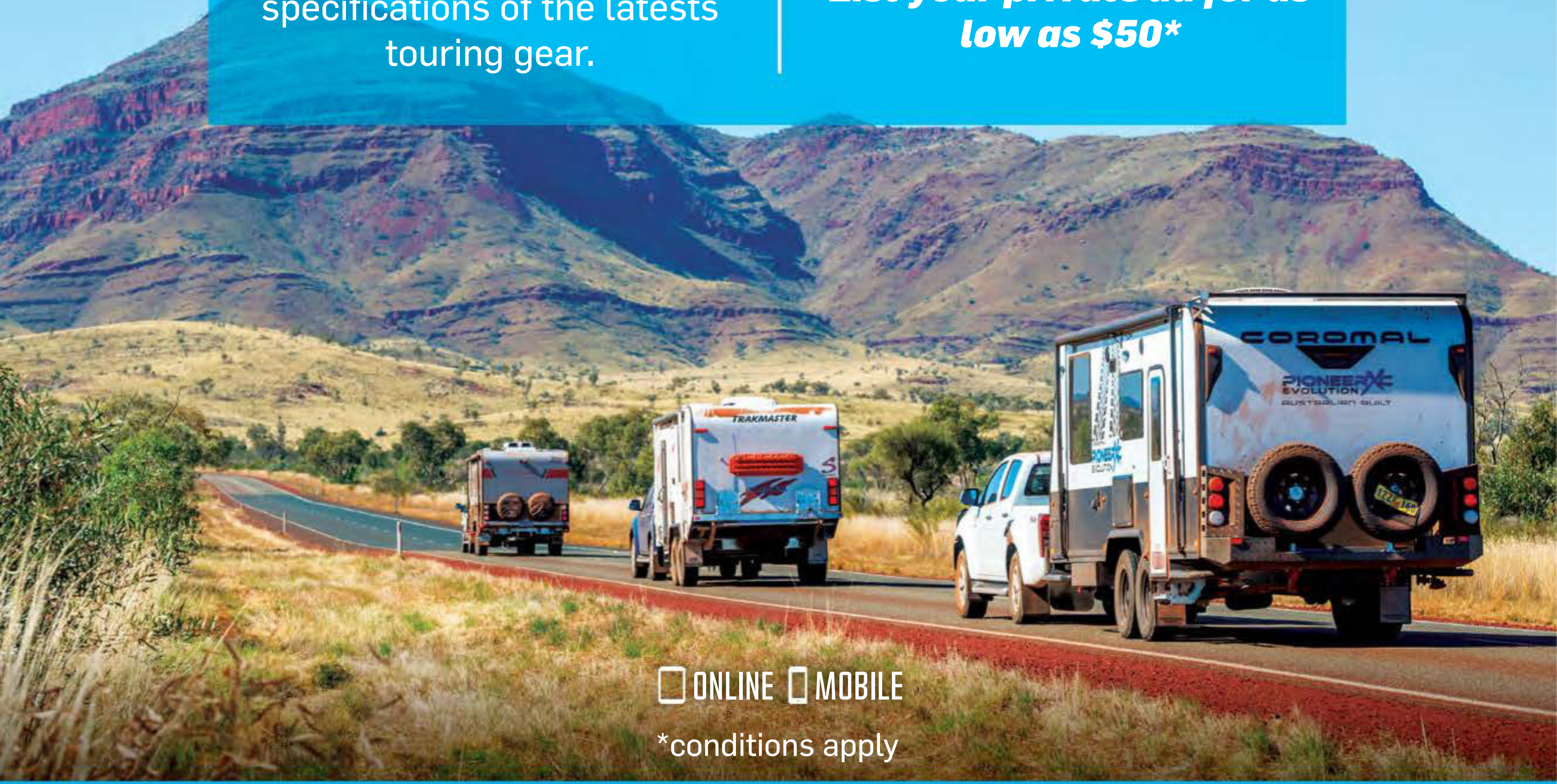
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BRING BACK THE ADVENTURER WITHIN WITH IGNITE ELECTRIC BIKES

Words Ian Bellert Pics Cam Inniss

Ignite Electric Bikes announces its first e-bike named 'The Commuter' which promises to provide mobility to those who want to easily get around town or are mobility restricted.

The Commuter e-bike by Ignite was in development for three years and has resulted in a bike with leading-edge technology and features. Easy to set up and lightweight, The Commuter has a range of approximately 50km which means trips to the shops or into town are easily achievable. A full featured display mounted on the handlebars provides speed, battery charge and distance till empty.

The battery has been specially designed by Ignite and uses branded battery cells from Panasonic, LG and Samsung. The battery can be easily swapped out for charging while driving. Power consumption can vary depending on the terrain, but the bike has adjustable power consumption which can be used to either extend your ride or extend your exertion.

The bike has integrated lights, front and rear, which automatically turn on as the daylight fades, letting you see and be seen. The handy cargo basket on the front of the bike and cargo rack on the back helps carry your cargo securely and its USB plug will keep your phone charged while you ride.

Glenn Avery, CEO of Ignite Electric Rides, says, "Electric bikes are a real enabler. They give people the ability and freedom to get back on a bike and ride, where they may struggle on a traditional bike."

"The bikes are designed for all body types. Our bikes have two options, a high-tube or step through. If you've ridden a lot, then the high tube is a frame you will be familiar with. The step through (without the high tube) is very popular as it is easy to mount and dismount, particularly if your mobility is restricted," Glenn added.

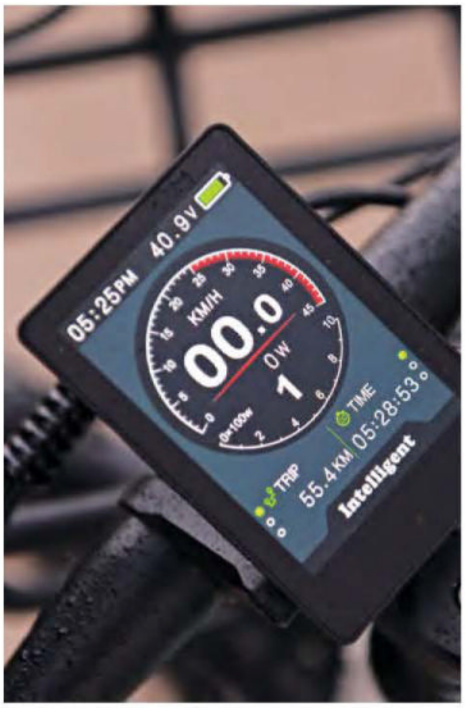
The upright riding position, generous seat and ergonomic handlebar position provide the rider with comfort. The seat post can go as low as 151cm which suits people with shorter legs. At full extension, tall bodies are well suited. Adjusting the seat post is via a quick-release lever at the base of the seat post.

The components used on the bike have been sourced from leading brands such as Shimano running gear and TEKTRO brakes.

The bikes are fairly lightweight at 23kg, and the optional Australian-made bike racks come with ramps to allow them to be easily mounted on the back of your car, caravan or camper trailer.

Bikes can be purchased online or at Ignite's three stores located in Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth. The Commuters range in price from $2290 to $2490 or there is a discount incentive for dual e-bike packs.

The Commuter e-bike can be purchased online at www.rideignite.com.au/collections/commuter. For further information call Ignite Electric Rides on (03) 9020 6076.



AN ENTERTAINMENT EXPERIENCE WITH NCE

A high-quality TV can make all the difference when travelling on the road — particularly on those rainy days when all you want is an ultimate entertainment experience.

NCE RV Specialist's latest Smart TV, the WEBOS TV, features an Intelligent Remote and Voice Command control — evaluated by NCE with RV travel in mind. The TV is lightweight, durable and specifically designed for Australian travel conditions.

NCE's newest Smart TV comes with the latest features such as 8G in storage, plus brilliant connectivity and voice command. It also includes the latest Quad Core CPU which ensures the TV is very responsive, and 700 Mhz GPU graphics, so that whatever you are watching feels as life-like as it gets. Combined with Dolby Sound System technology, you can sit back and enjoy a state-of-the-art entertainment experience.

Additionally, the TV offers a 'point and shoot' Magic Remote with motion-controlled navigation, allowing faster access to the right menus.

The TV is 12V compatible with a 10V–30V power system. There is a built-in surge protector to safeguard your TV from any power surge.

NCE's WEBOS TV is not only 100 per cent Google Certified, but also the first of its kind and supports wi-fi, RJ45, USB2.0, AV IN as well as the latest digital TV standards for access to the internet, your favourite streaming services and all those timeless classics that never get too old.

If you're not interested in paying for streaming services, NCE's Smart TV has access to a variety of LG channels via an internet connection, which you can access easily with the remote or via the handy voice controls.

The NCE WEBOS TV is available in 24in and 28in sizes and they are available for purchase now at a special introductory price:

NCE WEBOS 24in: $500 (RRP: $560)
NCE WEBOS 28in: $545 (RRP: $609)
For more information visit www.nce.com.au.

NRGVAULT PORTABLE POWER STATIONS

LASER, Australia's homegrown consumer electronics company, has unveiled its NRGVault-branded range of portable power stations, featuring two inaugural models, the PV500 (288Wh capacity) and PV1500 (1228Wh capacity).

NRGVault's portable power stations deliver a wide range of benefits for indoors and outdoors, home or on the go. Portable and lighter than previous generations of mobile power, it is a great accessory to take camping to power up lighting, run a mini-fridge, portable speaker, bug zapper and even a coffee maker. Or to ensure your laptop, phones, drone or photographic equipment always stay charged.

The NRGVault range is powered by a LiFePo4 Battery, the safest battery type in use. It can charge to 85% in under 90 minutes via a wall socket charge and lasts up to five times longer than lithium-ion batteries. The range comes with a standard three-year warranty.

In addition to traditional charging via a wall socket, the NRGVault range also comes with available additional accessories including a 12V DC cable for car charging and an option for solar panel charging to ensure consistent ability to recharge even when off the grid — a compelling option when camping or caravanning. Head online for more information: www.laserco.com.au.

DRINKMATE OMNIFIZZ

Words *John Ford*

Who doesn't like a cold fizzy drink on a hot day? Not many would be my guess. But for some, the thought of a sugary soft drink doesn't appeal because it's too sweet or the calories are a worry. And while DIY drink carbonators have been around for years, they are generally restricted to getting bubbles in only water.

This new system from Drinkmate is different. It looks and works the same as similar systems, but it will fill any number of beverages with hearty bubbles.

According to the company, the key is its patented Fizz Infuser technology. The Fizz Infuser provides a two-stage pressure release control that safely and efficiently lets you carbonate virtually any drink. So, you can easily add tasty sparkle to water, juice, iced tea, cocktails, wine, and more! With Drinkmate, you can be creative and explore new sparkling drinks that weren't even possible to make before. And you control what goes in them to avoid excessive sugar and harmful chemicals.

The Drinkmate uses 60L compressed food-grade CO2 without need for batteries or electricity. The cylinders are commonly available at supermarkets.

It's easy to install the CO2 cylinder into the back of the Drinkmate. First up, we tried carbonating some water, and it was superb. Loading was easy, and two blasts on the top tab was all it took. The bubbles were full and very effervescent, giving a delightful and refreshing drink.

Next, I thought orange juice with pulp might be a test, but the process was smooth and tasted great. There was no blockage in the fizz infuser, and a quick spray under the tap had it as good as new.

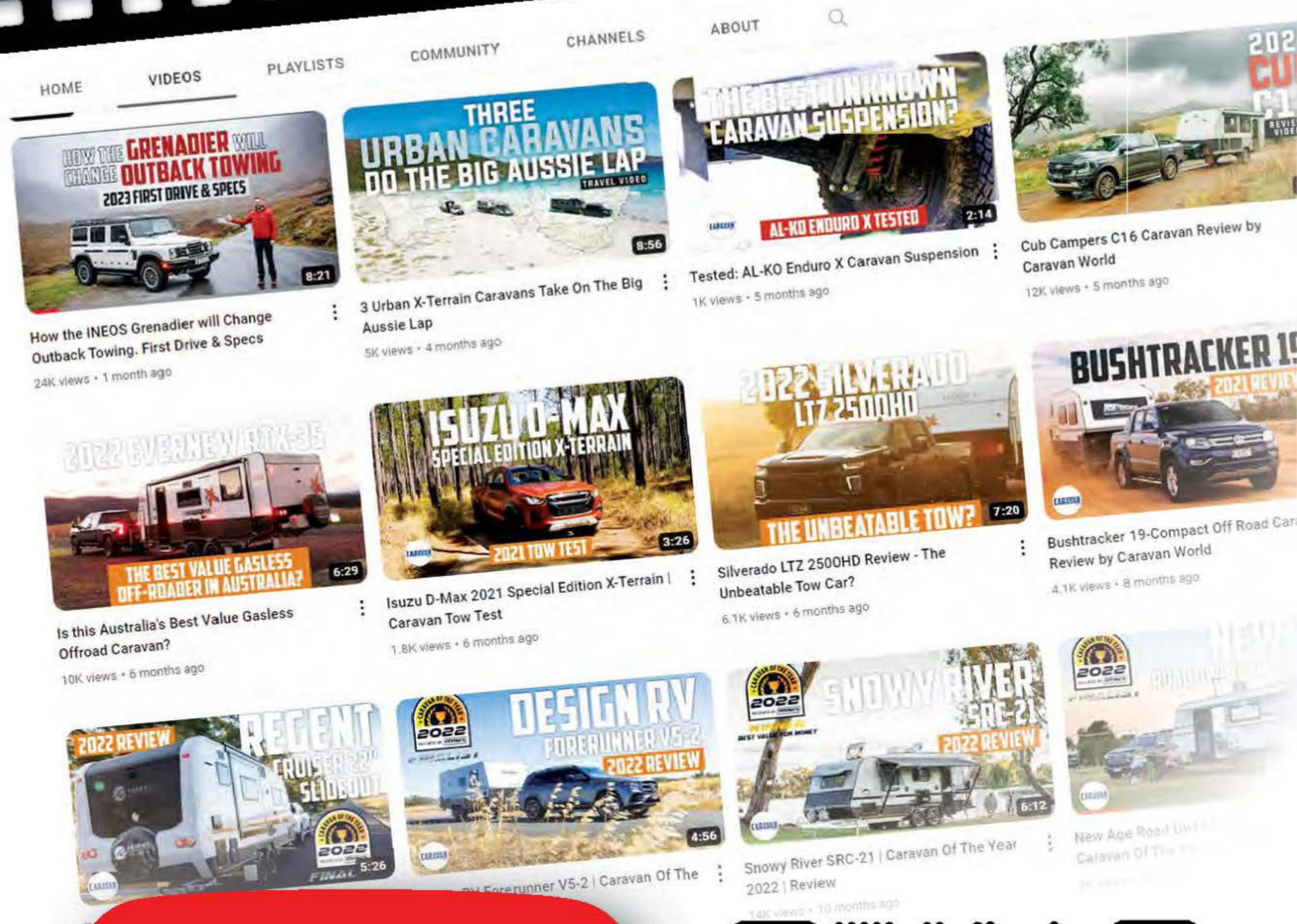
We tried a bottle of still white wine, and while it didn't turn into a $100 bottle of French champagne, the result was palatable and a bit of fun.

The Omnifizz comes in Arctic blue, white, red and black and retails for $102, including a proprietary bottle. Extra bottles cost $17 for a twin pack, and a spare fizz infuser costs $30.

ON SALE
11 MAY

.Next issue

As we roll into May, safety is going to be the order of the day. Find out everything you need to know about battery and power management solutions, upgrades for towing, and more. Then journey through Wilson's Prom and south Gippsland with Miriam Blakers.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